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ABSTRACT

This project addressed the lack of a covenant defining the practice of hospitality towards children for team members of Westview Boys' Home. The purpose of the project was to facilitate the creation of such a covenant. The Westview ministry team already claimed hospitality as a strength; the hope was that reframing the ministry around this strength would improve the quality of care for children and the quality of life for the community. Invited into a communal discernment process (the methodology), the ministry team invested weeks in the examination of biblical texts, theological tradition, personal and communal narratives, cultural trends, psychological data, and sample covenants. These conversations worked toward the development of a local theology of hospitality. The location and definition of principles and practices of hospitality funded the communal composition of a covenant. Process and covenant affirmed and strengthened the ministry team's ability to function as a hospitable community. The process also engendered respect for accountability to the covenant and the community. Clear standards and accountable behavior resulted in improved quality of care for children residing at Westview, improved ministry team relationships, and diminished stress for some ministry team members.

COMMUNALLY DISCERNING A COVENANT OF HOSPITALITY FOR THE CARE
OF CHILDREN AT WESTVIEW BOYS' HOME

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Graduate School

Abilene Christian University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Ministry

By

Ron Bruner

May 2010

This thesis, directed and approved by the candidate's committee, has been accepted by the Graduate Council of Abilene Christian University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

Doctor of Ministry

Dean of the Graduate School

Date

Thesis Committee

Chair – Dr. Jeff Childers

Dr. Stephen Johnson

Dr. Samjung Kang-Hamilton

To the young men who have called Westview home,
to the faithful community of saints on the ranch, who lovingly
practice hospitality in the radical way of Jesus,
and to Ann, wife, woman of wisdom,
who models for all of us the virtues
of which I dare to speak herein.

To the One who has drawn me into
all of these communities,
I give thanks.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Research is, for me, an adventure. One begins with an idea of what the trip might be like and the vistas that might be available upon arrival; in the end, one discovers that even a rich imagination has been inadequate to visualize the journey or the perspectives available at the destination. Such an adventure becomes richer when one has traveling companions who have made quite a few journeys on their own. This was my experience with my thesis committee. Ever hospitable, Dr. Jeff Childers challenged me to prepare extensively for this expedition, so that, in the end I might have discovered something worth reporting. His conversations have greatly enriched this work. When I stopped to get my bearings, Dr. Stephen Johnson was ever asking, “Did you see this?” or, “What if you were to pursue this course?” His insight and imagination were a blessing. As this journey neared completion, I was blessed by Dr. Samjung Kang-Hamilton’s ability to find virtue in these pages after I had labored over them so long I no longer had realistic perspective about their potential significance. I know few who would claim their defense was a hospitable event; through the graciousness of these three scholars, mine was.

For the wisdom of Dr. Tim Sensing in his persistent quest for focus in this project thesis, I am grateful. As a friend and mentor, Dr. Charles Siburt has convicted me of the importance of becoming a scholar-practitioner and encouraged my pursuit of that goal; for his example I am greatly appreciative. Karissa Herchenroeder deserves thanks for keeping her wayward charges on track and on time, and I, for one, am profoundly thankful.

At Westview, I appreciate the support of the board of directors for my continuing education and for this project thesis particularly. I am grateful to Shiann Metheny for her willingness to serve as a conversation partner, above all about matters psychological, and to Julia Birney for her meticulous attention to the text of this work. I remain thankful to the community at Westview Boys' Home. In the days leading up to the project, they prepared to receive this work; together we dwelled in the word, remained in hospitable conversation, and stayed to share food; in the end, they sent me out with what I needed to write until this thing could be done. Only God knows all of the good they do.

I am profoundly thankful for my loving family, for their empowerment of my practice of ministry and their persistent encouragement to pursue scholarly endeavors that might make that practice more competent and glorifying to God. They have been cordial colleagues in conversation, rigorous accountability partners, models of wise practice with young people, and exemplars of scholarship, setting a very high bar for a non-traditional learner. Living in hope of an increase in the number of fishing trips, book conversations, kayak expeditions, cooking experiments, and movie nights coming in the near future, I thank them for holding my place at the table.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This thesis focused on the need for a ministry intervention that invited the treatment team at Westview Boys' Home¹ to communally discern a theology of hospitality and then create a covenant framed by that theology that the community would practice daily in its ministry to at-risk children. Chapter 1 introduces this project with a description of the ministry at Westview, the youth it serves, and the ministry team. This chapter also describes the problem, purpose, assumptions, definitions, delimitations, and limitations of the project. Chapter 2 develops the requisite theology funding the project. Chapter 3 details the methodology of the intervention, the qualitative design of the project, and the methods of evaluation. Chapter 4 presents an evaluation of the results of the project, triangulating the perspectives of individual participant interviews, independent experts, and my field notes. Finally, chapter 5 considers the ministerial implications of the project at Westview and the potential future application to other contexts of the methodology, theology, and knowledge gained.

Title of Project

The title of this project is "Communally Discerning a Covenant of Hospitality for the Care of Children at Westview Boys' Home."

¹ Hereinafter referred to as "Westview."

Ministry Context

Westview is a relatively small residential child care facility situated in far southwestern Oklahoma. For over fifty years, it has been a community of hospitality to hundreds of at-risk boys. Members of the Churches of Christ founded Westview near Hollis in 1956, a time when children's homes were perceived to be benevolent works and to function as orphanages. Since then, a board of committed Christians from surrounding communities in Oklahoma and Texas has governed its operations. Westview's twenty team members have long-term commitments to the Churches of Christ and extend hospitality to boys in six large ranch homes on three separate campuses spread over a fourteen-mile span of Harmon County. As a working farm and ranch, Westview operates 1,600 acres that provide a place for the boys and staff to play, camp, ride horses, raise animals, hunt, and fish.² Westview's administrative team works from a centralized office location in downtown Hollis. The ministry team uses these resources to care for thirty-two to thirty-five boys per year.³

When a young man arrives at Westview, house parents welcome him into the house that will be his home during his stay at Westview. These homes range from 4,000 to 5,000 square feet in area. There, the house parents introduce him to the others living in this home: their children and his peers. Each young man shares a large bedroom with one other person. These young men and the house parent family function as a large family, sharing resources (place, entertainment, and meals), responsibilities (cleaning, laundry, cooking, yard work), relationships, and life. Most of Westview's residents have

² The farthest span between campuses is 14 miles; the closest proximity of any two resident houses is one quarter mile. Westview land encompasses several soil and wildlife conservation projects.

³ Westview Boys' Home, 2008 Annual Report (Hollis, OK: Westview Boys' Home, 2009), 3.

significantly more resources available to them at Westview than are accessible within their family of origin. House parents help the boys connect actions with consequences, the consequences being largely positive. As these young men demonstrate ethical and responsible behavior, their freedom of participation in outside activities increases, as does their access to resources.⁴ Discipline normally takes the shape of the loss of certain privileges or the addition of productive work responsibilities. Certain types of discipline are excluded by Oklahoma state regulation and Westview's ethical perspective: seclusion, loss of meals, and corporal punishment are strictly forbidden.⁵

House parents serve as Christian role models. The Westview community intends for youth to see Christ incarnate in each house parent's daily practice of the minute details of family life.⁶ The community hopes that the strength and quality of such lives will persuade the residents living in these exemplars' sphere of influence to choose to emulate such a Christian lifestyle. Consequently, house parents live in compliance with a set of specific virtue-based ethical principles and help the children in their care integrate a similar simple ethical system into their lives. The virtue-based ethical principles are

⁴ Westview Boys' Home, *The Westview Boys' Home Boy Handbook* (Hollis, OK: Westview Boys' Home, 2008), 9-12, 16, 20-23.

⁵ Oklahoma Department of Human Services, Division of Child Care, *Licensing Requirements for Residential Child Care Facilities* (Oklahoma City: Oklahoma Department of Human Services, 2006), 36-37.

⁶ Westview's practices are a vigorous enactment of Deut 6:4-9, and are consistent with extant moral theory. Robert Audi, *Moral Value and Human Diversity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 6. Robert Audi supports moral exemplars: "Thus, for adults as well as for children, and in ordinary life as in the professions, role models are absolutely crucial for moral learning. The person of practical wisdom is the chief role model in ethics; such people exemplify all of the moral virtues and also tend to be good advisors in ethical decisions."

respect for God, others, self, property, and nature.⁷ Through daily evaluations, house parents and boys hold each other accountable for their behavior using this standard.

In 2006, Westview team members saw a need for continuing support for young men from Westview who had graduated from high school, but were struggling with their launch into adulthood. The board of directors authorized an independent living program as a response to this need. The independent living program provides young men with the opportunity to obtain job skills and initial experiences in college or trade school while still maintaining the supportive structures of room, board, counseling, and community. In 2008, the Westview team reshaped the independent living program into a transitional living program, covering the functionality of the independent living program and adding proactive programming for young men who are in their senior year of high school. This program has already helped several young men make successful transitions into adult life.

The Young Men at Westview

Young men come to Westview due to varying combinations of lack of parental supervision, stressed family systems, incarcerated family members, poverty, behavioral issues, and their own legal problems. Over the last decade, only 10% of the young men at Westview have been orphans. The average length of stay for a boy in 2008 was 481 days, although some young men may spend up to ten years in Westview's care.⁸ Boys are between five and eighteen years old when they arrive, but many suffer developmental delays, causing their functional age to be considerably lower. Living in an environment

⁷ These principles are based on the Decalogue. For a more detailed explanation, see Ron Bruner, "Sustainable Success for At-Risk Children: An Ethic of Resources and Relationships" (paper presented at the Christian Scholars' Conference, Nashville, TN, June 27, 2008).

⁸ Westview, 2008 Annual Report, 3.

of poverty or neglect often causes such delays. In family systems terminology, these boys are typically the identified patients in a dysfunctional family system. When boys are the source of dysfunction, the staff at Westview uses its behavioral management program to help them gain a higher level of functioning. If the family has misidentified the child as dysfunctional and is itself the source of dysfunction, then the behavioral program equips these children to survive in that dysfunctional environment. Experience shows the actual source of dysfunction to be somewhere between these extremes. Not the source of dysfunction, but the level of dysfunction, drives the communities of origin to eject these young men, leaving them with the need for another place to live.

Westview residents come from a variety of family forms. Very few are from intact nuclear families. Most families of origin are single-parent families, with mothers leading approximately 80% of these families. Blended families frequently send boys to Westview; typically the step-parent confronts the biological parent with the choice of keeping the child or the partner. An increasing number of children come from families where grandparents are raising their grandchildren. Their children (the boys' parents) are often absent because they are incarcerated, in a drug rehabilitation program, or have lost custody of their children. Many grandparents find it difficult to bear up under the pressures of parenting two generations; health problems often exacerbate their dilemma.

Over the last several years, approximately ten percent of Westview's residents have come from families within the Churches of Christ. The remainder of the boys comes from family systems having some experience with other faith groups (mostly Baptist or Catholic) or from those having no experience with any faith group. Most of these boys are biblically illiterate; reading problems stemming from genetic, environmental, or

behavioral issues tend to worsen this reality. Consideration of family theories, specifically symbolic interaction theory, has deepened the administrative team's concern that the church speaks a special religious language the boys at Westview do not understand unless they remain at Westview long enough to be significantly socialized within this environment.⁹ Consequently, Westview has, with the Hollis Church of Christ, implemented a number of strategies to address this problem, including designing and implementing a curriculum where the boys are exposed to an overview of the biblical narrative (and requisite theological terminology) in their Bible school classes over a two-year period of time.¹⁰

Connections with the Local Church

Although Westview obtains financial support from many individuals as well as a large number of Churches of Christ, its relationship with the Hollis Church of Christ is the most significant. Westview functions as a community within this community, serving as a ministry of hospitality to needy young men. Although there have been some rifts between the congregation and Westview team members over the last fifty years, the general trend over the last ten years has been toward peace, harmony, and community.

⁹ James M. White and David M. Klein, *Family Theories*, 2nd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2002), 58-87.

¹⁰ Parents and guardians who place children in the care of Westview are aware of the religious affiliation of Westview, and sign an agreement that allows those children to be educated in a Christian world view. Marshall and Parvis hold that Article 14 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (hence, CRC) provides that "Parents or carers have a right to provide direction to the child in a manner consistent with the child's evolving capacities." Kathleen Marshall and Paul Parvis, *Honouring Children: The Human Rights of the Child in Christian Perspective* (Edinburgh: St. Andrews Press, 2004), 17. At the same time, children are not forced to believe anything that they do not wish to believe. Children have a right to form an opinion, and that opinion must be heard. This does not mean that children have the right to make their own decisions (Article 12, CRC). The CRC provides useful standards for the care of children even though the United States has yet to ratify it. See United Nations, "Convention on the Rights of the Child," (New York: 1989). Accessed at <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/law/pdf/crc.pdf> on August 28, 2009.

Community is an important word in the small farming and ranching town of Hollis, Oklahoma. The church has been a community within the larger community of Harmon County for over one hundred years, taking shape shortly after the arrival of the first settlers and serving this area peacefully and without division since. In those early years, there were a number of small community Churches of Christ meeting under arbors, in schools, in houses, and in small buildings. The Lacy Chapel, Number 2, OM, Ron, Shrewder, and Vinson churches were near small community schools of the same name, and the Martin Church was near Star Valley School. Many of these churches merged as roads and transportation improved. As other smaller churches within the county have closed their doors over the last five decades, the Hollis church has warmly welcomed their former members into its fellowship. At one point in time, Westview staff, families, and children helped the church grow to an attendance averaging in the mid-300s. More recently, a steady decades-long decline in the population of this agricultural county to 3,283 souls¹¹ has contributed to the reduction of the membership of the church to about 150.

Though the Hollis Church sees itself as theologically conservative, its views can be diverse and difficult to pigeonhole. It is more tolerant of diversity than many churches, at least to the extent that people may hold unorthodox beliefs as long as they do not become contentious in their dealings with the rest of the community. In dialogues with older members at Hollis over the years, “contentious” continues to be the label for anti-communal behavior. The focus of the church on community is also indicated in its values: hospitality, unity, fellowship, and forgiveness.

¹¹ U. S. Census Bureau, 2000 data, “Harmon County, Oklahoma,” accessed at <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/40/40057.html> on June 21, 2009.

Ministry Functions at Westview

There are a number of distinct ministry functions at Westview. Some of these functions involve teams, while others take the shape of individual ministry roles. Since Westview's ministry situation is unique in many ways, a detailed description of these teams and individual roles follows.

Teams

Each Westview team functions as a community of discernment. The administrative team focuses on larger issues confronting Westview. It is composed of the case manager, counselor, director of social services, transitional living program mentor, and executive director, who leads this team. The counselor leads the intake team (populated by the same members as the administrative team), which selects those young men who enter Westview. The house parent team includes those who minister daily to the children in the care of Westview. Its discernment focuses on the residents and their needs, both short and long-term. The transitional living program mentor leads this team. The treatment team has rotating leadership and combines administrative and house parent teams. Additionally, the treatment team discerns the need to form special-purpose teams to focus on specific issues. Those teams operate with an explicit directive and function for a finite time.¹²

¹² Or a charter. Harvard Business School Press, *Creating Teams with an Edge: The Complete Skill Set to Build Powerful and Influential Teams* (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 2004), 39-42.

Individual Ministry Roles

The case manager administers the day-to-day implementation of Westview's health, safety, recreational, social, and ministry programs, and maintains confidential records for each resident. The counselor leads the intake process for residents and conducts the ongoing therapeutic counseling provided for the children. The director of social services oversees the behavioral and educational programs of Westview. The executive director serves as the ministry team leader at Westview. House parents are the married couples responsible for the day-to-day care of Westview's residents. The transitional living program mentor works with the young men in that program. Other staff members are responsible for accounting, commissary, donor relations, and ranching at Westview; their work is critical to its ministry, yet not directly related to this particular project.

Current Contextual Practices

Previous executive directors at Westview used a highly authoritarian, hierarchical organizational structure. Decisions emerged from the top of this structure. I have gradually moved Westview away from this structure and implemented in its place a team approach that minimizes hierarchy. At the same time, my personal leadership role has become more pastoral than managerial.¹³ The administrative team and I empower ministry team members to make decisions within their spheres of authority according to established standards of practice and within the boundaries of Christian ethics. The

¹³ Though leadership may be pastoral, there are rigorous management and accountability systems in place, both for the care of the children and for the stewardship of resources. For example, independent auditors perform an annual audit of Westview's finances, which are then appropriately reported as required by statute to the IRS. Other regular audits include those done by Oklahoma Department of Human Services Licensing, State Fire Marshal, State Health Department, and the Department of Environmental Quality.

administrative team also provides on-call support for all team members twenty-four hours per day, seven days per week.¹⁴ Spiritual principles guide Westview's day-to-day dealings with its clients, clients' parents, donors, business partners, regulators, neighbors, and constituency.

In an attempt to correctly model to the young residents of Westview appropriate behavior by men toward women, respect for the feminine gender has been established as a theological and practical imperative. Many of these at-risk young men have inappropriate attitudes toward women and female authority. During my tenure, team members have taken deliberate steps to empower the voice and action of women in ways not practiced previously.¹⁵ Consequently, women have been empowered, established as team leaders, and given full voice at all team meetings.

Dissent by any team member is permitted and, at times, actively encouraged.¹⁶ Dissent assures the team's consideration of multiple perspectives and allows the possibility of hearing a prophetic voice amidst the dialogue. The main guideline for dissent is that the speaker should show respect for others while expressing that dissent.

Although all Westview team members have a large array of decisions within their control, decisions with larger impact are often approached using communal discernment.

¹⁴ There are specific on-call assignments for all administrative team members, with all staff members being aware of the appropriate person to call for assistance or resources.

¹⁵ This is not to say that I am content with our progress on the gender issue at Westview either in giving women voice or in accessing their wisdom.

¹⁶ Using the language of bell hooks, Arthur Sutherland observes that "'Talking back' becomes a method of decentering and reconstructing the language of authority." Arthur Sutherland, *I Was a Stranger: A Christian Theology of Hospitality* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2006), 55.

Westview gradually implemented this practice beginning in 2007.¹⁷ Communal discernment has been particularly effective since then, especially since this community brings to the table a diversity of education, experience, giftedness, and passion. As they consider evidence, Westview teams privilege tradition when it speaks with a clear voice. When tradition does not speak to the question, it yields the floor to experience first (especially when informed by research or education) and culture second. Sometimes the discernment process requires multiple meetings to reach a decision. In such cases, teams spend time between meetings prayerfully seeking better understanding of the evidence, clearer guidance from the Spirit, and God's definitive action in narrowing choices.¹⁸

As teams at Westview make communal decisions, four basic processes are available.¹⁹ Majority rule requires taking votes and allows a simple majority to make the decision. Democracy can be swift, but often leaves simmering dissent. Consensus requires each team member agree to the proposed solution; this approach can be problematic, though, when team members, weary of an unending argument, concede the point instead of coming to real agreement. Small group decisions allow the team to delegate a specific issue to a subset of the team to allow the subset to leverage its

¹⁷ An explanation follows in chapter 2 (pp. 89-94). The philosophy underlying communal discernment is found in Frederick Aquino, *Communities of Informed Judgment: Newman's Illative Sense and Accounts of Rationality* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2004). The theology informing Westview's communal discernment comes from Luke Timothy Johnson, *Scripture and Discernment: Decision Making in the Church*, rev. ed. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996). The practical theology shaping the practice derives from James D. and Evelyn E. Whitehead, *Method in Ministry: Theological Reflection and Christian Ministry*, rev. ed. (Chicago: Sheed and Ward, 1995), 3-22. An alternative approach to communal discernment is Danny E. Morris and Charles M. Olsen, *Discerning God's Will Together: A Spiritual Practice for the Church* (Nashville: Upper Room Books, 1997). This work is a synthesis of traditional Christian spiritual discernment practices and the previous separate work of Morris and Olsen. It involves a ten component process that is useful, but considerably more complex than the approach used at Westview.

¹⁸ Johnson, *Scripture and Discernment*, 106-7.

¹⁹ Harvard Business School Press, *Creating Teams with an Edge*, 50-51.

experience with additional time and research so as to recommend a solution for the entire group. This technique has the potential to take advantage of team member experience and interest, but can unintentionally quash input from those who were not able to be a part of the dialogue. Leader decisions with input require the team to recommend a decision to the leader, then rely on that leader (or other supervising person or group) for approval. Normally effective, this method can put the leader in the unenviable position of undermining the team process if the final decision of the leader subverts that of the team.

While teams at Westview use all of these decision-making processes, they prefer to seek consensus in discernment.²⁰ Although my education and experience cause me to sometimes offer a significantly different perspective from those of other team members, I attempt to exercise pastoral leadership in team meetings so as to honor both the feelings of the team and theological imperatives. All Westview teams attempt to be sensitive to the will and action of God. Inagrace Dietterich reminds community members, though, that communal discernment is not all about them: “Communal discernment is not a matter of the prerogatives of the designated leaders or the equal privileges of members, but of the corporate responsibility for discerning the wisdom and prompting of the Holy Spirit.”²¹ Westview team members take this obligation seriously.

²⁰ Although idealistically it would be preferable to discern all decisions communally, life and ministry require too many decisions for this to be a practical process for every decision. Thus some decisions are made using other processes. Yet when a decision stands at the core of a ministry or touches on a long-term practice of that ministry, then those circumstances make it increasingly important to engage in a communal discernment process.

²¹ Inagrace Dietterich, “Missional Community: Cultivating Communities of the Holy Spirit,” in *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America*, ed. Darrell L. Guder (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 227. With slightly different logic, Grady King concurs. In an intervention involving communal discernment at a local congregation, King concluded: “The connections between mutual love, practicing moral decision-making, and following Christ’s example prevent community discernment from being a democratic process.” Grady D. King, “In the Wilderness: Communal

Statement of the Problem

All ministry teams at Westview perform at a high level of competence and attempt to advance their performance by engaging in continuous quality improvement of the care they provide for children. Such a practice necessarily involves being appropriately self-critical. The following issues are recurring themes in that self-evaluation. Unsafe behaviors of at-risk children sometimes provoke Westview team members to emphasize holiness over openness and safety over vulnerability.²² When a child persists in problematic behavior, staff members sometimes focus on what they perceive to be the truth (or at least what is factual) about this child, often using negative terms, instead of perceiving where hope might be a part of the child's future. Such practices lead to times of stress in which staff members sometimes too hastily separate staff children from children in care.²³ Such choices are antithetical to enacting the values of a hospitable community.

After their first few months of service at Westview, novice team members tend to experience an increased stress resulting from the building awareness that their previous understandings of a practical theology of children are inadequate to cope with the

Discernment as a Leadership Response to the Missional Adaptations of the South MacArthur Church of Christ" (D.Min. thesis, Abilene Christian University, 2006), 26.

²² Explanations of these virtues and their importance appear in chapter 2 (pp. 32-52).

²³ One might ask, "By what standard are these behaviors unacceptable or too extreme?" It is by the self-evaluation of the team, both corporately and individually, that these assessments of inadequacy arise from a comparison of performance in a particular case with the team's self-imposed intuitions. This means one of two things. First, the assessments of the team are correct and there really is a problem of performance that requires more clearly defined standards and principles that might lead to their achievement. Or team members incorrectly perceive their success or the appropriateness of their responses, thus requiring more carefully defined principles of discernment and standards of behavior. Those principles and standards allow the team to generate more accurate evaluations and avoid inflicting unnecessary guilt upon team members. A behavioral covenant may well serve that purpose.

children in their care. Challenging events with youth acting in risky ways can traumatize team members. Later, similar sequences of events may stimulate a reoccurrence of this trauma. House parent perceptions of how they feel in challenging situations are often dissonant with their idealistic expectations of how they ought to feel. Such cognitive dissonance seems to exacerbate an unacceptably high rate of ministry turnover.

It is important to locate the “domain of human interaction” in which these problems take root. Accessing the philosophy of Lord John Fletcher Moulton, Gil Rendle lists three domains in which human beings relate to one another. The domain of law describes interactions where the law-abiding citizen has no choice but compliance with existing law. Since Westview team members seek to scrupulously comply with extant law and Westview policy, this domain is not problematic. The domain of free choice is left open to everyone at Westview because it is precisely that: the freedom to choose. It is in the domain of manners and obedience to the unenforceable that the problems are located. Since ministry to human beings is so complex that it is neither desirable nor practical to construct hard and fast rules with which to regulate such ministry, an agreed-upon set of theological principles and practices as defined in a covenant may serve as a useful guide.²⁴

Westview team members usually practice an intuitive but radical form of hospitality to children. The aberrations (described above) point to an inadequate communal understanding of a theology of hospitality toward children and question whether our current practical theology can sustain an appropriately hospitable

²⁴ Gil Rendle, *Behavioral Covenants for Congregations: A Handbook for Honoring Differences* (Bethesda, MD: Alban, 1999), 31-36. Although Rendle describes covenants as tools to cope with conflict, covenants also hold the potential to improve group acceptance of and compliance with communally discerned theology.

community. Although I could construct such a theology and teach it as a series of lessons to the Westview ministry team, such a move coheres with neither the nature of this community nor a theology of hospitality. Nor does experience show unilateral decision-making processes to be particularly useful in assuring accountability and compliance. Thus this project addressed the following problem: as a community, Westview team members need a covenant defining the practice of hospitality towards children.

Statement of the Purpose

The purpose of this project was to facilitate the creation of a covenant defining the practice of hospitality towards children. Thus, ideally, this project was supposed to affirm and strengthen the ministry team's ability to function as a hospitable community, communally develop a theology of hospitality toward children for ministry at Westview, and produce a written covenant, establishing the standards for all Westview team members relative to the theology of hospitality. I planned for the process to engender respect for and accountability to the covenant. I intended that such accountability would result in improved quality of care for children resident at Westview and in diminished stress for ministry team members. Furthermore, the project was to produce a covenant that provided a process of covenant education and acceptance for all new team members. Ideally, such a covenant was to contain a feature empowering team members to call for ongoing modification of the covenant as experience in using it increases and as contextual factors change.²⁵

²⁵ Rendle, *Behavioral Covenants*, 53.

Assumptions

This project assumes the covenant this intervention produced would bring about improved hospitality toward children. This same idea entailed the assumption that team members care about children and value Christian perspectives and practices. Seeking to solve the defined problem with a communally discerned covenant also assumed engaging the team in the process of writing the covenant would insure a higher level of investment in the practices described by the covenant. The project further assumed novice team members joining Westview in the future might receive the covenant differently from the team members who composed it; at the same time I assumed such novices would more readily conform to an existing culture of hospitality, thus compensating for the potential difference in reception.

Definitions

Within this work, certain words have a particular meaning. I have defined specific ministry roles and teams earlier in this chapter. In the course of this work, I will define other significant words as they become a part of the discussion.

At-risk youth. Living in environments linked to specific risk factors, at-risk youth lack adequate protective forces in their communities to empower them to choose positive behaviors and outcomes instead of negative or dangerous behaviors and outcomes.

Character. An aggregation of virtues and vices, character describes either an individual or a community.

Child. In this thesis, a child is the human between birth and 18 years of age.

Community. A collection of two or more people, a community shares a common belief system, interest, location, or purpose. A community has both identity and

character. A community can be nested within a larger community, as a ministry team or a youth group can be within a larger church body, for example.

Covenant. Unless otherwise specified, the specific type of covenant intended by the use of the word covenant in this work is a behavioral covenant. The working definition for this term is that constructed by Rendle: “A behavioral covenant is a written document developed by leaders, agreed to and owned by its creators, and practiced on a daily basis as a spiritual discipline.”²⁶

Practice. A repeated action or exercise, a practice brings individual or communal growth toward habits, which then become virtues (or vices).

Vice. A vice is a moral failure either of the individual or of the community.

Virtue. A virtue is a moral excellence either of the individual or of the community. When a virtue is capable of being exercised inappropriately or excessively, then another virtue may serve to keep it in check. I will refer to such dyads of virtue as *tensive virtues*.

Youth. Usually synonymous with adolescent, teenager, young man, or young woman, a youth is a young person between 13 and 19 years of age.

Delimitations

This project focused on informing the theology of hospitality for team members involved in the composition of the covenant. Since the study group consisted of Westview’s direct care staff, the project addressed the specific group experiencing the difficulties detailed in the problem statement. The project thus maximized the potential benefit for Westview.

²⁶ Rendle, *Behavioral Covenants*, 50.

Limitations

Although this project produced a covenant, the covenant cannot alone carry the weight of providing hospitality to children at Westview. It is necessary for those who minister to children at Westview to actually engage in specific, tangible, hospitable practices, and resist enacting behaviors that are inhospitable. Westview team members and the children in Westview's care must reciprocate in life-sustaining hospitality by building upon the resources and relationships within their individual and communal control.

Gendered Language

All of the residents currently in care at Westview are male. When the text refers specifically to those children, the language will naturally be specific in gender: masculine. Thus the use of "boy" or "young man" is precise language and is not intended to be exclusive. Since Jesus lived as a human male, pronouns referring to him will be masculine. In all other cases, whether speaking of deity, children, or adults, language will be appropriately gender neutral. Some quoted sources may not follow this practice.

Conclusion

Westview has an honorable history of ministry with at-risk youth. Over the last several years, the team at Westview has coalesced into a tightly knit Christian community seeking to continuously improve the quality of its ministry with those in its care. At the same time, this group has become more proficient in making decisions with a communal discernment process. The quality of the community and its experience with a communal discernment process were two fundamental prerequisites for this project. The team's deep

spirituality, commitment to biblical imperatives, accountability to a strong community, and passion to serve children are natural stimuli to share hospitality with the young men in its care. Yet the demanding nature of ministry with at-risk youth, many of whom have yet to function well in any community, strains the emotional, intellectual, physical, and spiritual resources of even the most committed team to remain a persistently hospitable community. The lack of anything more than an intuitive understanding of hospitality substantially increases the level of difficulty for a community to practice hospitality sustainably. Communal discernment of a covenant defining the boundaries and contours of a practical theology of hospitality to children had the potential to call team members to a consistent standard of hospitality, provide theological norms for accurately interpreting and appropriately responding to situations, and relieve the pressure on team members in stressful situations by providing guidance through those theological principles. Chapter 2 develops the theology that funds the communal discernment of such a covenant.

CHAPTER 2

THEOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

To adequately fund a theology for the project described by this thesis, this chapter accomplishes four broad theological tasks. The first of these tasks is development of the fundamental tools and resources necessary to equip interpreters of both texts and situations to understand the nature and practice of hospitality in the first-century Mediterranean world and in contemporary settings. The first section, resources for an understanding of hospitality, begins the first task by clarifying the domains in which hospitality operates, revealing certain understandings of hospitality to be unsatisfactorily narrow. In contrast, my own view of hospitality suggests practices that are broadly applicable in most human endeavors. I will present the findings of scholars as to the vocabulary, motives, and practices of hospitality in the ancient Mediterranean. This will allow readers to identify biblical texts that the writers would have perceived to involve hospitality. Simple linguistic criteria make the identification of such hospitality narratives clear and uncomplicated. Having thus identified and characterized hospitality narratives, I will develop hermeneutical tools to identify ways in which Jesus changes the practice of first-century hospitality in his ministry and models the *just practice of hospitality* for his followers. I will construct a hermeneutic using contemporary theological, philosophical, and social scientific resources. The hermeneutic will empower interpreters to differentiate practices of hospitality that are just from those that are not and will be applicable to concrete situations. The first section will conclude with a consideration of various

definitions of hospitality. I will demonstrate the utility of the resources provided in this section over the course of the following three sections.

The second section of this chapter presents an examination of biblical texts that reveal God to be a God who chooses to interact with human beings in hospitable ways. This section, hospitality as a practice and virtue of God serving *missio Dei*, will demonstrate that both biblical texts and theological traditions amply describe God's Trinitarian practice of hospitality: Jesus shares hospitality with the people who surround him, the Creator provides resources and relationships to all human beings that are life-giving, and the Spirit abides as the holy guest of a holy people. Thus the divine practice of hospitality is not merely a biblical theme; it is central to *missio Dei*.

The recognition of the hospitable character of the God to whom the community belongs strengthens the case for hospitality as a core component of the character of God's people. I present that case in the third section: the people of God and hospitality. Not only is hospitality a divine virtue; it is the persistent practice of God and God's people in the restoration of God's relationship with humanity throughout history. The hospitable God sends the people of God out into the world in imitation of divine hospitality. Additionally, through hospitable discernment, the people of God may interpret the community's situation, recognize the movement of God, gauge an appropriate response, and thus work alongside God in the divine mission. Consequently, I will define a process allowing a hospitable community to use established practices, communal discernment, and behavioral covenants to interpret and hospitably respond to its ever-changing situation.

Finally, the words of Jesus require the practice of hospitality by the church in order to obtain an appropriate ministerial relationship with children. Thus in the fourth section, hospitality and children, I will explain the utility of hospitality as a framework for a practical theology of ministry to children, specifically to troubled youth. Christian communities choosing to interpret their situation, shape their practices, and evaluate their effectiveness through the rubric of hospitality will ethically care for children.

Resources for an Understanding of Hospitality

We begin our first task by developing the necessary resources for this theological framework. As a multivalent term, hospitality has obtained many different meanings in various contexts. This section begins by identifying domains in which hospitality might function. Next, the correct interpretation of texts or situations involving hospitality requires the interpreter to work with an accurate understanding of its meaning in the context of interest. Unfortunately, not all of those who seek authority for hospitality within the biblical text have taken this into account.¹ Others have better adjusted to this reality.² The task is to understand hospitality in the era of the primitive church so as to properly ground a resultant theology in the biblical texts. Following subsections will couple linguistic and social scientific tools to describe the horizon of hospitality in the ancient Mediterranean. Then, making use of contemporary resources, I will construct a

¹ Arterbury makes this point most extensively and takes John Koenig particularly to task. Andrew Arterbury, *Entertaining Angels: Early Christian Hospitality in its Mediterranean Setting*, New Testament Monographs 8 (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2005), 4-12. See John Koenig, *New Testament Hospitality: Partnership with Strangers as Promise and Mission* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985). Hobbs also finds an anachronistic view of hospitality to be problematic. He consequently defines ancient Israelite hospitality much more narrowly than several other theologians. T. R. Hobbs, "Hospitality in the First Testament and the 'Teleological Fallacy,'" *JSOT* 95 (2001): 3-30.

² Christine D. Pohl, *Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 4, 6, 17, 31, 33, 47, 57. Pohl calls the reader's attention to this changing definition.

hermeneutic of hospitality that will allow interpreters to view the horizon of the biblical texts from a contemporary point of view. The perspectives of both horizons provide a theological framework describing a coherent and biblically rooted theology of hospitality. With these concepts in hand, I will then be able to construct a working definition of hospitality.

The Domains of Hospitality

Andrew Arterbury notes that hospitality encompasses relationships and virtue.³ As he describes hospitality in the ancient Mediterranean, he differentiates various types of hospitality by specific persons, motives, and practices.⁴ Therefore, a broader perspective of hospitality will undertake, at a minimum, to describe hospitable practices, relationships created or maintained by those practices, and the virtues resulting from habitual practice. These virtues constitute the character of a hospitable person or community. This tripartite form (practice, relationship, virtue) also reveals the presence and operation of hospitality within the domain of philosophical ethics.⁵ Robert Audi delineates normative ethics as the consideration of three questions: (1) what is the character of a morally good person, (2) what does the morally good person do, and (3) what does the morally good person value?⁶ Thus an adequate ethical description of hospitality for a Christian would reveal hospitality to be a virtue in the character of a

³ Arterbury, *Entertaining Angels*, 21.

⁴ Arterbury, *Entertaining Angels*, 24-54.

⁵ Jacques Derrida, *On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness*, Mark Dooley and Michael Hughes, trans. (London: Routledge, 2001), 16-17. Derrida goes so far as to equate ethics with hospitality: “‘To cultivate an ethic of hospitality’—is such an expression not tautologous? . . . Ethics is hospitality.” As substantial as the connection may be, this is an overstatement.

⁶ Audi, *Moral Value and Human Diversity*, 5.

Christian, hospitable practices to be a part of what a Christian does, and the creation, restoration, or maintenance of relationships through hospitality to be that which a Christian values. The same holds for Christian community. Yet Elizabeth Newman finds hospitality to be more than a philosophical or ethical issue; it also engages the domains of worship, economics, and politics.⁷ This short and incomplete list of domains does not limit the practice of hospitality; rather, it makes a case for the ubiquitous exercise of hospitality in all human relationships and endeavors.

The Vocabulary of Hospitality

The key to understanding hospitality and its practice in the early church is awareness of the language of hospitality. Knowledge of contextual semantic cues allows the interpreter to select those texts the first-century reader would have perceived to have involved hospitality and to make more appropriate theological judgments based on contextually sensitive readings of the text. The 1965 dissertation of John Mathews, “Hospitality and the New Testament Church,” begins the systematization of the New Testament technical vocabulary of hospitality.⁸ According to Mathews, the Greek nouns

⁷ Elizabeth Newman, *Untamed Hospitality: Welcoming God and Other Strangers* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2007). Newman discusses worship in chapter 2 (41-69), economics in chapter 3 (73-103), ethics in chapter 4 (105-22), and politics, specifically those of education, in chapter 5 (123-46). Patrick Keifert connects worship and hospitality, although he challenges how well individual congregations do this. Patrick R. Keifert, *Welcoming the Stranger: A Public Theology of Worship and Evangelism* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992). Jane McEvoy finds hospitality provides a theology to guide educators in their exercise of power and politics; Jane McEvoy, “Hospitality: A Feminist Theology of Education,” *Teaching Theology and Religion* 1 (1998): 20-26.

⁸ John B. Mathews, “Hospitality and the New Testament Church: An Historical and Exegetical Study,” Th.D. dissertation, Princeton Theological Seminary, 1965. In ProQuest Dissertations and Theses. <http://proquest.umi.com/pqdweb?did=757933461&sid=2&Fmt=6&clientId=46809&RQT=309&VName=PQD> (accessed July 8, 2009).

ξενία and φιλοξενία describe hospitality.⁹ The noun ξενός could mean either host or stranger (or guest), whereas the words πάροικος (alien) and παραπίδημος (foreigner) have a less ambiguous meaning. The verbs ξενίζειν and λαμβάνειν, as well as the compounds of the latter,¹⁰ denote receiving, taking in, or welcoming a guest. In a similar way, δέχεσθαι and its compounds¹¹ signify receiving, or welcoming. The expression εἰσάγειν ὑπὸ στέγην (to lead under the roof) is comparable to εἰσερχεσθαι ὑπὸ στέγην and εἰσερχεσθαι εἰς τὸν οἶκον (to enter into the house, to accept hospitality). Καταλύειν means to find lodging as a guest, and μένειν and its compounds¹² often represent staying, or accepting hospitality. The verb ἀναπαύειν denotes giving rest, and similarly, the noun ἀνάπαυσις, a place to rest. “The numerous occurrences of these words in the Lucan writings suggest, at least with respect to Luke-Acts, that one is again confronted with technical terminology associated with the practice of hospitality in the ancient Church.”¹³

Abraham Malherbe affirms and extends the vocabulary of hospitality of Mathews.¹⁴ He finds that the verb προπέμω (to send on or to accompany toward the destination) connotes “to speed on a journey” in the context of hospitality. Οἶκος (house) alone, even when not a part of a larger expression, can often imply hospitality. Arterbury adds the terms ἀσπάζομαι (the host greets the stranger) and κατακλίνω (seating the

⁹ The adjectival form of hospitality is, therefore, φιλόξενος.

¹⁰ For example, ὑπολαμβάνειν, προσλαμβάνειν, and παραλαμβάνειν.

¹¹ Ἀποδέχεσθαι, προσδέχεσθαι, ἀναδέχεσθαι, and ὑποδέχεσθαι.

¹² Including ἐπιμένειν and καταμένειν.

¹³ Mathews, “Hospitality,” 172.

¹⁴ Abraham J. Malherbe, *Social Aspects of Early Christianity*, 2nd ed. (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1983), 66-69; 96-110.

guest).¹⁵ This list will expand through the course of this study, yet these words begin to isolate a particular reality about hospitality: its association with place.¹⁶

Humans are, after all, beings located in physical space.¹⁷ The guest leaves the transit of improvident space, enters the place of a host, and dwells in the providence and protection of that place and its community. Having provided resources and relationship, the host (or community) sends the guest out, prepared to continue the journey. Thus the practice of hospitality produces a set of relationships forming a community, however transient. Both the community and the set of practices it maintains are located in a particular place.¹⁸ This collocation enables a readier understanding of the human tendency to topophilia; fondness for a particular place may emerge from the relationships or practices connected to it and not necessarily result from the beauty of the environment.

The Motives of Hospitality

Though hospitality has a consistent vocabulary, it is not monolithic in motivation. Motives can be important differentiators between types of hospitality. Ladislaus Bolchazy elaborates seven distinct motives influencing the practice of hospitality in the ancient Mediterranean and Rome: (1) avoidance of strangers, (2) apotropaic hospitality, (3) “Medea” hospitality, (4) theoxenic hospitality, (5) *ius hospitii*, *ius dei*, (6) contractual

¹⁵ Arterbury, *Entertaining Angels*, 54.

¹⁶ Pohl, *Making Room*, 136.

¹⁷ John Inge, *A Christian Theology of Place* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2003), 13-20. I use Inge’s definitions of space and place: “What is undifferentiated space becomes for us significant place by virtue of our familiarity with it. The two terms might be thought of as tending towards opposite ends of a spectrum, which has the local at one end and the infinite at the other. Spaces are what are filled with places” (1-2).

¹⁸ Inge, *A Christian Theology of Place*, 131.

hospitality, (7) altruistic hospitality.¹⁹ Bolchazy lists these practices in what he suggests to be their order of development. Andrews confirms the last five motives, discarding avoidance as xenophobia, or a failure to show hospitality, and subsuming apotropaic hospitality (a ritualistic “disenchanted” of the stranger) under the category of “Medea” hospitality.²⁰ “Medea” hospitality reacts to fear of strangers, appeasing the dangerous stranger so as to prevent them from using their powers, magical or otherwise, against the host.²¹ Theoxenic hospitality is rooted in the belief that the gods habitually visited humans while disguised as humans; in such form they tested their hosts and provided blessing or punishment depending upon the quality of hospitality or inhospitality shown to them by their hosts.²² Ovid’s tale of Baucis and Philemon enacts a prototype of this hospitable motive.²³ *Ius hospitii, ius dei* centers on the belief of the host that the gods “sanction” a specific stranger’s right to hospitality; the host, therefore, extends hospitality so as to please those divinities.²⁴ Contractual hospitality develops a permanent relationship whereby two families or individuals agree to reciprocally provide “blessings, provisions, and protection” for each other when one would travel as a guest through the place inhabited by the other, who would serve as host. Ratified and maintained with an exchange of gifts, this agreement entails blessings and obligations passed from one

¹⁹ Ladislaus J. Bolchazy, *Hospitality in Early Rome: Livy’s Concept of Its Humanizing Force* (Chicago: Ares, 1977), 1-15.

²⁰ Arterbury, *Entertaining Angels*, 24ff.

²¹ Mathews, “Hospitality,” 140-41; Bolchazy, *Hospitality*, 6-7; Arterbury, *Entertaining Angels*, 24.

²² Bolchazy, *Hospitality in Early Rome*, 7-9; Arterbury, *Entertaining Angels*, 24-25.

²³ Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 8.618-724. This story connects with the biblical narrative: Acts 14:8-20.

²⁴ Bolchazy, *Hospitality*, 10-11; Arterbury, *Entertaining Angels*, 26-27. “*Ius hospitii, ius dei*” translates as “Right of hospitality, right of the god.”

generation to the next.²⁵ Altruistic hospitality finds its host motivated primarily from love for other persons.²⁶ Such a claim to altruism might be limited by two realities: the generally mixed motives of human beings and the consideration of character, or honor and shame in ancient cultures.²⁷ If the practice of hospitality ennobles the virtue and character of the practitioner in the perceptions of others, or if the choice to be hospitable or inhospitable affects the balance of honor and shame calculations, is such hospitality purely altruistic?

Ancient Hellenistic and Roman societies directly correlate hospitality and character in their literature. Andrews observes, “Homer repeatedly associates inhospitality with a person who is unjust and hospitality with a person who fears the gods.”²⁸ Bolchazy also finds connections between hospitality and character among Roman authors, particularly in Cicero and Livy. He quotes Cicero:

The most eminent men (*clarissimi viri*) in the country, during the best period of our history (*tempora optima*), counted it among their most honorable and splendid achievements (*hoc sibi amplissimum pulcherrimumque ducebant*) to protect from injury, and to maintain in prosperity, those guests and retainers of theirs, the foreign nations who had been received as friends into the Roman empire.²⁹

Thus hospitality reflects well upon the host and the host’s community.

²⁵ Bolchazy, *Hospitality*, 11-12; Arterbury, *Entertaining Angels*, 27. This obligation customarily transfers from father to son, an attribute of a patriarchal society.

²⁶ Mathews, “Hospitality,” 141; Bolchazy, *Hospitality*, 12-15; Arterbury, *Entertaining Angels*, 28.

²⁷ Bruce J. Malina and Jerome H. Neyrey, “Honor and Shame in Luke-Acts: Pivotal Values of the Mediterranean World,” in *Social World of Luke-Acts: Models for Interpretation*, Jerome H. Neyrey, ed. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1991), 57-59. Malina and Neyrey discuss how honor and shame complicate hospitality.

²⁸ Bolchazy, *Hospitality*, 33-34; Arterbury, *Entertaining Angels*, 32.

²⁹ Cicero *Div. Caec.* 20.666, as translated by Bolchazy in *Hospitality*, 34. Bolchazy describes Livy’s perspective as well (57-64).

These varying motives for ancient hospitality reveal different attitudes and practices toward reciprocity. Generalized reciprocity involved the belief that the gift of hospitality was one the guest ought to reciprocate, but not necessarily to any particular person in any specific way within any limited time. Essentially such practice seeks to “pay it forward” instead of “paying it back.” Generalized reciprocity might be extended horizontally to another human being or vertically in honor of the deity served by one or both of the participants within the hospitable exchange. Balanced reciprocity required guests to reciprocate within a limited period of time, directly to their host, through practices or gifts similar to those from which they themselves had benefitted. Balanced reciprocity was frequently connected with the nearly *quid pro quo* practice of a permanent, contractual hospitality.³⁰ It is important, though, to distinguish hospitality based upon reciprocity from hospitality or some other social function based upon a patron-client relationship or benefaction. The first assumes a near balance of status and power, whereas the patron-client relationship is an enduring connection based upon significant differences between both the resources and social status of the patron and those of the client. Benefaction describes the impersonal transaction between a benefactor and a constituency (not an individual), where the benefactor occasionally offers his or her generosity to those of lower status and wealth in order to gain honor.³¹

³⁰ Arterbury, *Entertaining Angels*, 18-19.

³¹ For an extensive description of these concepts, particularly as they connect with Luke’s gospel, see Jonathan Marshall, *Jesus, Patrons, and Benefactors: Roman Palestine and the Gospel of Luke*, Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament, 2. Reihe 259 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009), 27-42. There tends to be balanced reciprocity in hospitality, patronage, and benefaction, however incommensurate. Wealth, for example, may be shared so as to receive honor. Arterbury, *Entertaining Angels*, 39.

Contextual Practices of Hospitality

Although Mediterranean and Hellenistic culture strongly influenced Jewish hospitality, there were significant differences. Hobbs asserts several realities marked hospitality in the “First Testament.”³² Hospitality was for strangers, not relatives or neighbors. No precise rules for hospitality existed, but rather there were certain models for its appropriate practice.³³ Hosts practiced hospitality in the privacy of their homes; it was not a public event. In the initial stage of hospitality, host and guest sometimes engaged in a challenge-riposte process where they negotiated their relative social status. Peers could exchange hospitality, but if the host and guest discovered a substantial difference in their statuses, a patron-client relationship might instead ensue.³⁴ After the challenge, the host would either accept the stranger as a guest, or the stranger would make an exit.³⁵ Quite often honor or shame was involved in how well, or how poorly, hospitality was offered.

Arterbury avers that Jewish hospitality functions in a manner similar to ancient Mediterranean hospitality, yet differs in four particular ways.³⁶ A different “meta-narrative” shaped Jewish hospitality: that of Abraham (Gen 18:1-33), not the work of Homer. Hospitality in the Jewish setting was typically briefer, sometimes lasting only one meal. Jewish customs did not require hosts to lavish gifts upon guests, as was more

³² Hobbs, “Hospitality in the First Testament,” 10-19.

³³ Arterbury, *Entertaining Angels*, 59-71. For Israelites and Jews, Abraham’s behavior in Gen 18 was prototypical of appropriate hospitality.

³⁴ See also Malina and Neyrey, “Honor and Shame,” 29-31.

³⁵ Does this explain the behavior of David and Nabal in 1 Sam 25? See Hobbs, “Hospitality in the First Testament,” 25-28.

³⁶ Arterbury, *Entertaining Angels*, 58.

typical in Hellenistic practice. The synagogue became the place where the Jewish traveler might seek out hospitality. This was particularly the habit of teachers, who often travelled in pairs. There were also modifications of other Mediterranean practices within Jewish hospitality. Where the host might welcome the stranger with the resources for a bath in the Hellenistic household (sometimes administered by a servant), the Jewish practice was to offer water for the bathing of the feet (something a servant might perform).³⁷

Who, though, is the stranger in need of hospitality? Hobbs differentiates between the *gerîm* (resident aliens) and the *nokrîm* (threatening foreigners), but concludes neither were likely candidates for hospitality in ancient Israel. Eventually, he decides:

“Hospitality, then, is directed at those relatively unknown travelers who are assumed to be members of one’s larger community, but not immediately recognized as such. In no cases are threatening foreigners (*nokrîm*) or resident aliens (*gerîm*) offered hospitality.”

Hobbs overstates his case.³⁸ Arterbury asserts that Jews may very well have been reticent about accepting hospitality in a Gentile’s home, but did not appear to be so concerned about having Gentiles in a Jewish home.³⁹ This may well emerge from concerns about potential dietary issues in the home of a Gentile, which would not have been problematic in the home of a Jew.⁴⁰

³⁷ Arterbury, *Entertaining Angels*, 57.

³⁸ Hobbs, “Hospitality in the First Testament,” 23-24. He makes his rule work by excluding counter examples. Hobbs uses two implicit and arbitrary tests: (1) if reciprocity is involved, then the event is not about hospitality, and (2) if they do not fit his model, they are anomalous and do not constitute hospitality.

³⁹ Arterbury, *Entertaining Angels*, 162-64. He makes his case in his study of Peter’s visit to the home of Cornelius (Acts 10). He also describes legends in which Abraham established hospitable houses for the conversion of Gentiles.

⁴⁰ A careful Jew very probably might not be able to eat a meal at a Gentile’s home, but it seems unlikely that a Gentile would have qualms about eating a Jewish meal.

A Hermeneutic of Hospitality

Any examination of texts or situations involves a hermeneutic.⁴¹ Once the interpreter (or interpreting community) has identified a textual or experienced episode as one of hospitality, a hermeneutic evaluating the quality of that hospitality may provide critical insight into the text or event as well as useful perspective for improvement of hospitable practices. In this section, I construct such a hermeneutic. Later in this work I will demonstrate the utility of this interpretive tool by using it to read several episodes of hospitality from the Lukan narrative. Once proven in the interpretation of texts, the hermeneutic will be available for the interpretation of situations for Christians who are concerned with the implications of power and justice in the practice of hospitality.

Letty M. Russell has developed a hermeneutic to evaluate the justice of hospitality in a given situation. Accessing feminist and post-colonial theology, Russell saw “just hospitality” as a means to obtain solidarity among human beings. She prescribed three lenses for a hermeneutic of hospitality: “pay attention to the *power quotient* in what is being said or who is saying it,” “give priority to the *perspective of the outsider*,” and “rejoice in *God’s unfolding promise*.”⁴² This hermeneutic is useful, but because there are other factors in hospitable events besides power, perspective, and promise, I propose broadening and balancing Russell’s categories.

⁴¹ The use of hermeneutics for texts is well understood. The use of hermeneutics for situations is a concept derived from pastoral counseling. See Charles V. Gerkin, *The Living Human Document: Re-Visioning Pastoral Counseling in a Hermeneutical Mode* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1984), 20-22.

⁴² Letty M. Russell, *Just Hospitality: God’s Welcome in a World of Difference*, ed. J. Shannon Clarkson and Kate M. Ott (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2009), 43. Emphasis by Russell.

The Lens of Safety and Vulnerability

Russell requires first that the observer “pay attention to the power quotient in what is being said or who is saying it.”⁴³ Yet power is only one side of a dyad: power and kenosis. Jesus modeled the use of power on behalf of others, particularly the marginalized. He also practiced kenosis to the extent that he emptied himself of power to serve humanity, becoming so vulnerable he experienced suffering (Phil 2:5-8). His divine suffering found solidarity with all sufferers and victims.⁴⁴ Therefore, suffering and vulnerability are attributes not only of humans, but also of God. According to David Jensen, this vulnerability is not a part of the essence of God, but of the relationship of Godself with difference and otherness, even within the Trinity.⁴⁵ He argues such vulnerability is necessarily a part of human relationships as well: “If vulnerability is a dimension of the *imago Dei*, it does not emerge as an essence of children’s lives, but in the network of difference and personal relationships in which children live. Children are vulnerable to others, and thus point to the God of Christian faith and the creatures God creates in love.”⁴⁶ Whether one accepts Jensen’s identification of vulnerability as a part of the *imago Dei*, its reality in human relationships remains. As people abandon vulnerability and become overly concerned with safety in relationships, they cease to behave in ways that are either child-like or God-like, and relationships suffer. Vulnerability allows for openness to relationship, both in depth and number. Jensen goes

⁴³ Russell, *Just Hospitality*, 43.

⁴⁴ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life: A Universal Affirmation*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1992), 130-31.

⁴⁵ David H. Jensen, *Graced Vulnerability: A Theology of Childhood* (Cleveland: Pilgrim, 2005), 29-33.

⁴⁶ Jensen, *Graced Vulnerability*, 48-49.

on to suggest that only when adults are appropriately vulnerable with children will their power relationship with those children be properly balanced.

With vulnerability, however, violence and abuse seem all too prevalent. Any vulnerability allowing the possibility of victimization is abhorrent to feminist thinking and ought to be unacceptable to others also. Yet to prevent victimization, it is equally necessary for those who have power prone to abuse to release such power, and for those who are vulnerable to the abuse of power to reject vulnerability within a persistently abusive relationship.⁴⁷ Both require a kenotic move. Sarah Coakley has responded to feminist objections to kenosis by connecting kenosis with ascetic practices.⁴⁸ Coakley suggests that all humans have some sort of power; it is necessary for them to engage in ascetic spiritual practices (specifically, contemplative prayer), allowing them to avoid either mindless release of power or abuse of it.⁴⁹ In silence, one creates a place into which God is invited, empties oneself of power before God, and awaits insight from God for the use of that power. The insight given clarifies whether those holding power should release it to remain before God, relinquish it into the hands of others for use on behalf of themselves or others, or retain the power to use directly for God's purposes. The first two choices leave the one holding power vulnerable, despite possession of power. Such ascetic practice is obviously susceptible to abuse, but the idea of returning power to God

⁴⁷ Hans Boersma, *Violence, Hospitality, and the Cross: Reappropriating the Atonement Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 118. Hans Boersma responds to feminist concerns with release, or self-sacrifice, of power: "Self-sacrifice is asked not just of the oppressed and the marginalized but also of those who are in power. It is hard to believe a society could operate without any element of self-sacrifice. In a world where no one is willing to give up his or her own interests for the sake of others, power struggles and constant violence would dominate the scene. Hospitality becomes impossible when self-giving love is repudiated."

⁴⁸ Sarah Coakley, *Powers and Submissions: Spirituality, Philosophy, and Gender* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), 3-37. Coakley's arguments are much more elaborate than can be explained in detail here.

⁴⁹ Coakley, *Powers and Submissions*, 34-37.

to use as God desires, and not as the human heart desires, has possibilities.⁵⁰ A potential enhancement of Coakley's concept is communal discernment of the use of power. Such a move provides multiple perspectives for decision-making and accountability for the use of power (see 89-90).

In practical terms, parenting children involves similar choices and practices. One example is Bonnie Miller-McLemore's concept of "transitional hierarchy" and "transitional sacrifice," which amounts to changing forms of power and kenosis between parent and child as both mature.⁵¹ Parents must wield and yield the various types of power at their disposal in ways that change as children mature in their own use and understanding of power. Yet power and kenosis are not adequately broad terms for parent-child interactions.

Safety is a condition and virtue more broadly descriptive of the human need to avoid suffering, whenever possible, for self or another.⁵² Safety is not just the avoidance of pain resulting from the abuse of power. It is also security against injury from unintentional, neglectful, or self-inflicted dangers, and providence for those resources and relationships that are life-giving. Vulnerability is more than the kenotic act of emptying; it goes beyond kenosis to become the willingness to hear, see, receive, sympathize, and possibly even suffer with or for the other. Therefore, the broader terms of safety and vulnerability subsume power and kenosis in hospitality. Both of these tensive virtues are

⁵⁰ Such a move would be consistent with Ignatian practices of discernment. See Ignatius of Loyola, *The Spiritual Practices of St. Ignatius*, trans. Luis J. Puhl (Chicago: Loyola, 1951), 169-88.

⁵¹ Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore, *In the Midst of Chaos: Caring for Children as Spiritual Practice* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2007), 88.

⁵² Russell, *Just Hospitality*, 86-91. Russell also understood the importance of safety, although she did not place it in tension with vulnerability. She describes this idea in terms of safe space, or sanctuary. Space is a concept found elsewhere in my development of this hermeneutic.

desirable, yet the two must find their appropriate balance in a given situation. The terms of safety and vulnerability also subsume the tensive virtues describing the use of possessions: stewardship and generosity.⁵³ In order to maintain a hospitable community, it is necessary to maintain the tension between both parts of the dyad.⁵⁴ Life as humans know it ceases to be tolerable as people approach either complete safety or complete vulnerability, even if obtaining either of these goals were desirable or possible.⁵⁵ Freedom of movement and choices exist between them. Miller-McLemore asserts that child's play can only happen in this tension between "ultimate vulnerability" and "extreme safety."⁵⁶ It may be that this condition is necessary for the creative work and play of all humans.

How does one maintain this balance, protecting the vulnerability of one party without violating the safety of the other? The threat of violence to the vulnerable seems to require protection of the vulnerable to be violent as well. Although some contend

⁵³ Stewardship aligns with safety and generosity with vulnerability. The use of possessions is intimately connected with power and hospitality, as Luke demonstrates in Luke-Acts. This connection will become apparent in the exegeses of the texts that follow later in this chapter.

⁵⁴ Pohl, *Making Room*, 92-103. Although Pohl does not make this statement directly, this is the tension between the communal virtues of safety and vulnerability she describes in the latter part of her chapter 5.

⁵⁵ One might imagine "complete safety" as an inappropriate use of resources leading to gridlock. One negative extreme of vulnerability is shame. Lamb connects the feelings of shame and vulnerability: "The experience of shame is one of intense vulnerability. The shamed person feels 'naked, defeated, alienated, lacking in dignity and worth.'" She speaks of shame in the emotional sense, not the social sense (as with honor-shame). Lamb observes that shame can be experienced by both perpetrator and victim. Sharon Lamb, *The Trouble with Blame: Victims, Perpetrators, and Responsibility*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), 141.

⁵⁶ Miller-McLemore, *In the Midst of Chaos*, 150. This concept emerges from her reading of Isaiah 11:8. Elaine Heath speaks clearly about the dangers of imbalance between vulnerability and safety for children; see Elaine A. Heath, *The Mystic Way of Evangelism: A Contemplative Vision for Christian Outreach* (Nashville: Baker Academic, 2008), 52-58. Yet children are not the only people who can be too vulnerable; for an insightful essay about the overextension of vulnerability by those in ministry, see Eugene H. Peterson, "Teach Us to Care, Not to Care," in *Subversive Spirituality*, Jim Lyster, John Sharon, and Peter Santucci, eds. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 154-68.

violence is not often necessary to maintain hospitality, Jacques Derrida connects all hospitality with violence. The practice of conditional hospitality implies violence in that “you control the borders, you have customs officers, and you have a door, a gate, a key and so on.” If instead hospitality were to be “unconditional” or completely vulnerable, then one must “accept the risk of the other coming and destroying the place, initiating a revolution, stealing everything, or killing everyone.”⁵⁷ In either case, violence taints all hospitality.

Hans Boersma responds convincingly to Derrida’s claims. Boersma does not deny the possibility of violence, but disputes the necessarily immoral outcome of a connection of violence with hospitality. Seeking first to clarify terms, Boersma accesses Donald X. Burt’s definition of violence: “any act which *contravenes the rights* of another. It can also be described as an act which *causes injury* to the life, property, or person of a human being, oneself or others.”⁵⁸ Boersma adds that such violence is not necessarily physical (it can cause mental or emotional pain, as well) and that “structures and institutions” are as capable of violence as are humans.⁵⁹ Describing the hypothetical situation in which a person might attempt suicide, Boersma applies Augustinian ethics to demonstrate using violence to prevent suicide is arguably justified. Even though this preventative violence might cause injury to both the will and the body of the suicidal person, such violence prevents a greater injury: death. Yet no reasonable claim can be made for this exertion of

⁵⁷ Jacques Derrida, “Hospitality, Justice, and Responsibility: A Dialogue with Jacques Derrida,” in *Questioning Ethics: Contemporary Debates in Philosophy*, ed. Richard Kearney and Mark Dooley (London: Routledge, 1999): 70-71. Derrida connects hospitality with cosmopolitanism and political refuge; see also Jacques Derrida, *On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness*, 16-23.

⁵⁸ Donald X. Burt, *Friendship and Society: An Introduction to Augustine’s Practical Philosophy* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 162; italics by Burt.

⁵⁹ Boersma, *Violence, Hospitality, and the Cross*, 44. Boersma thus avoids an arbitrarily limited definition of violence and avoids a claim of special pleading for God or for the practice of hospitality.

power, however justifiable or motivated by concerns about safety, to be considered a non-violent act. Boersma instead notes, “In an imperfect world violence (the infliction of harm or injury) is at times the only option and as such a moral obligation and an act of love.”⁶⁰

Even God, Boersma argues, must resort to violence in this imperfect world in order to regain in the eschaton the perfectly hospitable world where violence is no longer necessary. Thus the use of force and boundaries become necessary to facilitate earthly hospitality. Christians approximate the kingdom of God in this world when they are able to shape hospitality with a minimum of violence, but perfect hospitality without violence is only possible in the heavenly kingdom. Thus Boersma’s work provides support for the balanced practice of the tensive virtues of safety and vulnerability.

The Lens of Openness and Holiness

Next, Russell’s hermeneutic of hospitality urges the interpreter to “give priority to the perspective of the outsider.”⁶¹ Who is the outsider? Are Christians alien, or are other people? Amy Oden finds evidence in early Christian literature that the early church viewed outsiders to be those who were at risk and unwillingly vulnerable. “Early Christians talk about hospitality to the sick and injured, to the widow and the orphan, to the sojourner and stranger, to the aged, to the slave and imprisoned, to the poor and

⁶⁰ Boersma, *Violence, Hospitality, and the Cross*, 47. Burt observes: “a typical Augustinian analysis of violence will admit that violence is *morally permitted* if it is an act of ordered love; that is, if it is a choice which does not disturb the order of the universe. One may be *morally obliged* to perform a violent act if it is clear that such an act is necessary or useful for the preservation or promotion of order.” Burt, *Friendship and Society*, 164; italics by Burt.

⁶¹ Letty M. Russell, *Just Hospitality*, 43.

hungry.”⁶² These categories are rooted in the narratives of Scripture, and in the communal experience of life as an alien people in this world (1 Pet 2:11).⁶³

Volf cautions Christians not “to complain too much about Christianity being ‘alien’ in a given culture.”⁶⁴ God does not intend for Christians to be outsiders to their own cultures (John 17:14-15). Volf rejects the notion that Christians are a *tertium genus*, with Jews and Gentiles as the other peoples.⁶⁵ Instead he asserts, “Christians are not insiders who have taken flight to a new ‘Christian culture’ and become outsiders to their own culture; rather when they have responded to the call of the Gospel they have stepped, as it were, with one foot outside their own culture while with the other remaining firmly planted in it. They are distant, and yet they belong.”⁶⁶ The Christian tradition has long wrestled with this ambivalent relationship with culture.⁶⁷ Yet the true alien, the true outsider, is the stranger to the community.

Identifying the stranger, Oden observes, is a matter of recognition. “The stranger may seem suspicious or even dangerous. The very presence of the stranger can be

⁶² Amy G. Oden, *And You Welcomed Me: A Sourcebook on Hospitality in Early Christianity* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2001), 20.

⁶³ Oden, *And You Welcomed Me*, 38. “It is not so far a step from understanding oneself to be a stranger in the world to identifying with other political, economic, and social strangers, nor visa versa,” observes Oden.

⁶⁴ Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996), 39.

⁶⁵ Jacob Jervell, *Luke and the People of God: A New Look at Luke-Acts* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1972), 49. Jervell finds, “The early catholic understanding of the church as a *tertium genus* in relation to Jews and Gentiles and ultimately as the *new Israel* that is made up of Gentiles and Jews is not present in the book of Acts.” Peter Richardson agrees with Volf: “Only one work prior to A.D. 150 thought of Christianity as a *tertium genus*, and that in the context of worship.” *Israel in the Apostolic Church*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 23. So also C. F. D. Moule, *The Birth of the New Testament* (New York: Continuum, 1981), 46-67.

⁶⁶ Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 49.

⁶⁷ For a useful anthology of such texts, see Oden, *And You Welcomed Me*, 36-48.

disorienting.”⁶⁸ Feelings of suspicion about strangers often signal misinterpretations of the situation. In any potential situation of hospitality, the Christian must somehow sense the opportunity to accept, while resisting the temptation to reject, Jesus in the form of an outsider (Matt 25:31-46). To recognize the stranger, Christians must look for Jesus in “the least of these” (Matt 25:40, 45), even to the extent, Oden notes, that in some early Christian texts, the host finds “the visitor will not even be human.”⁶⁹ The acceptance of Jesus in the form of the lowly guest brings Jesus into the hospitable event. This may cause confusion as to the roles of guest and host; the welcome into the life of God and the blessings the guest brings to the table may cause the host to feel they have received more from hospitality than that which they have given.⁷⁰

Volf, though, presses the Christian community much further in its recognition of the outsider:

For the self shaped by the cross of Christ and the life of the triune God, however, embrace includes not just the other who is a friend but also the other who is the enemy. Such a self will seek to open its arms toward the other even when the other holds a sword. The other will, of course, have to drop the sword, maybe even have the sword taken out of his hand, before the actual embrace can take place. Yet even the struggle over the sword will be undergirded by the will to embrace the other and be embraced in return.⁷¹

⁶⁸ Oden, *And You Welcomed Me*, 50.

⁶⁹ Oden, *And You Welcomed Me*, 51.

⁷⁰ In such an event, Oden claims, “Christ becomes the host and the host becomes the guest.” *And You Welcomed Me*, 51. I disagree. Although it seems obvious that the providence of God funds every hospitable event, the presence of God does not require the role of God be host. Even when Christ enters the event as stranger, his presence does not necessitate the divine role automatically reverting to that of host (see the definition of hospitality below). This study will show the practice of Jesus in his ministry is such that he was willing to assume either the role of host or guest as the occasion required. This appears to be a kenotic move, a yielding of power on the part of God. At the same time, the host-guest role confusion may well signal the balancing of power and the emergence of peace among the host, guest, and divine presence.

⁷¹ Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 146.

If Christians intend to practice openness to the extent Jesus did, they must be willing to forgive and seek reconciliation with the perpetrator of even the most brutal and deadly acts; not just acts against their own persons, but acts against those they love. Here Volf underscores the reality that any openness toward a reconciling embrace must deal with violence, both that which lingers from the past in memory and consequence and that which is potential in the present. Such an imperative would seem to require the oppressed to be open to further unholy violence from their oppressors, but Volf's metaphor of the sword and embrace illustrates the necessity of a more nuanced approach to forgiveness and reconciliation.⁷² Even so, this radical openness to reconciling embrace and hospitality remains inherently risky.⁷³ Human beings are essentially dangerous. The experience of most humans warns them that those proven dangerous tend to repeat dangerous behaviors. Therefore, this radical openness to reconciliation and hospitality risks the repetition of violence from either the incorrigible perpetrator or the fearful and defensive victim.

The potential for violence and injury reveals the intrinsic connection of openness to the tension between safety and vulnerability.⁷⁴ Yet even the most unsafe and dangerous enemy is not totally other. Emmanuel Lartey reminds those engaged in intercultural work that all humans are in some aspects "like all others," "like some others," and "like no

⁷² See Volf's lengthy discussion, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 119-40.

⁷³ Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 147. "There is the risk of embrace. . . . I open my arms, make a movement of the self toward the other, the enemy, and do not know whether I will be misunderstood, despised, even violated or whether my action will be appreciated, supported, and reciprocated. I can become a savior or a victim—possibly both."

⁷⁴ The following discussion will reveal that not just openness, but the tension between openness and holiness are interrelated with safety and vulnerability.

other.”⁷⁵ Finding commonality within hospitality may help bridge gaps allowing for reconciliation, but the other will forever retain its alterity. There will always be aspects of each human that are “like no other” and are therefore incomprehensible and potentially subject to the evaluation of being inappropriately dangerous.

Russell sought a hospitality offering an openness engendering ecumenism and diversity, allowing the other to cease being other, at least in the sense of being an outsider. Yet an openness that entertains the ideas of outsiders, even if the community follows Russell’s wisdom and gives them priority in its conversation, does not require the community to accept the outsiders’ ideas *carte blanche*. Is it possible for a Christian community to be open to all kinds of thinking and behavior? That Russell found it necessary to construct a hermeneutic for hospitality connected with justice implies the existence of practices of hospitality that are acceptable and others that are not. One can fairly extrapolate this reality into the notion that a community might hear and entertain outside ideas and persons without the necessity of endorsing or enacting those ideas and without complete acceptance of the outsider. Acceptance into community can have several stages,⁷⁶ yet complete openness without the need for membership and conformance to communal norms would result in a loss of identity.⁷⁷ Once again, it is

⁷⁵ Emmanuel Y. Lartey, *In Living Color: An Intercultural Approach to Pastoral Care and Counseling*, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: Jessica Kingsley, 2003), 34.

⁷⁶ A useful example is the process of conversion. Alan Kreider outlines four stages of socialization in the fourth century church that lead the individual through various levels of participation within Christian community into a complete belonging: evangelism, catechumenate, enlightenment, and mystagogy. He notes, though, that at different times in church history the order of belief, behavior, baptism and belonging have varied. Alan Kreider, *The Change of Conversion and the Origin of Christendom* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1999), 21-22.

⁷⁷ Newman, *Untamed Hospitality*, 30-33. Equating the person without boundaries to a person without identity, a nobody, Nouwen asserts, “No real dialogue is possible between somebody and a nobody.” Henri Nouwen, *Reaching Out: The Three Movements of the Spiritual Life* (New York:

necessary to place openness within a dyad so as to give it appropriate boundaries. In Henri Nouwen's discussion of hospitality in *Reaching Out*, he makes just such an observation:

But receptivity is only one side of hospitality. The other side, equally important, is confrontation. To be receptive to the stranger in no way implies that we have to become neutral 'nobodies.' Real receptivity asks for confrontation because space can only be a welcoming space when there are clear boundaries, and boundaries are limits between which we define our own position. Flexible limits, but limits nonetheless.⁷⁸

The boundaries defining the Christian community are those aspects that make it separate, or holy. The holiness of the community becomes the boundary, the place where those who would belong must be confronted with the norms that make this community separate from other communities.⁷⁹ Therefore, openness and holiness are tense attributes of the hospitality of a Christian community.

In parent-child relationships, the tension of openness and holiness most readily compares to an authoritative style of parenting. The authoritative parent attempts to balance limit-setting with a child (boundaries/holiness), and nurturance toward that child (openness). Several studies have correlated authoritative parenting with better-adjusted

Doubleday, 1975), 99. Boersma avers, "Hospitality is an art that is impossible to practice when we refuse to challenge evil." Boersma, *Violence, Hospitality, and the Cross*, 35. See also Thomas W. Ogletree, *Hospitality to the Stranger*, 55-56.

⁷⁸ Henri Nouwen, *Reaching Out*, 98.

⁷⁹ Pohl concurs: "Within much of the biblical tradition, there are tensions between living a distinctive life, holy to the Lord, and the command to welcome strangers. Their relationship is best understood through the theological framework of covenant—bonds of responsibility and faithfulness connecting guests, hosts, and God. Only in this context can we understand the simultaneous practices of inclusion and separation. Faithful believers who practice hospitality understand themselves to be in a relationship with God whose worship requires holiness, a distinct identity, and attention to the needs of others." Pohl, *Making Room*, 136. Hanson finds such an idea in his reading of Luke 10:2; he sees a triad of worship, righteousness, and compassion. Paul D. Hanson, *The People Called: The Growth of Community in the Bible* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1986), 425.

children.⁸⁰ Studies of at-risk children demonstrate the connection between groups that reject children and youth who are “more emotionally unresponsive, more dependent, less emotionally stable, and more aggressive.”⁸¹ Societies that are highly accepting of children correlate with a more normal development, self-reliance, and achievement-orientation in children. Though they are highly accepting, communities open to these young people must also help them address the behaviors placing them at risk.

The Lens of Truth and Hope

The last lens of Russell’s hermeneutic of hospitality requires the interpreter to find ways an event or text might “rejoice in God’s unfolding promise.”⁸² The interpreter must choose to hope for the unfolding of God’s promise because the truth about the present is often very different from that for which the interpreter might hope. “In the light of the present promise and hope, the as yet unrealized future of the promise stands in contradiction to given reality,” concludes Moltmann.⁸³ Thus truth stands in tension with hope. “The truth will make you free,”⁸⁴ but its immediate effect is often not so empowering. A constant dose of reality without the hope that things ought to be and will be different most often leads to despair, both for the community and the individual.

⁸⁰ Ellen K. Slicker, “Relationship of Parenting Style to Behavioral Adjustment in Graduating High School Seniors,” *Journal of Youth and Adolescence* 27 (1998) [database on-line]; available from Questia, <http://www.questia.com/PM.qst?a=o&d=5001352060>; Internet; accessed 12 July 2009. This study confirmed previous studies with similar results.

⁸¹ Martha R. Burt, Gary Resnick, and Emily R. Novick, *Building Supportive Communities for At-Risk Adolescents: It Takes More Than Services* (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 1998), 33.

⁸² Letty M. Russell, *Just Hospitality*, 43.

⁸³ Jürgen Moltmann, *A Theology of Hope: On the Ground and Implications of a Christian Eschatology*, trans. James W. Leitch (New York: Harper and Row, 1967; repr., Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 224-25.

⁸⁴ John 8:32, NRSV.

Truth can be beautiful. This is particularly so when truths describe the action and person of God. Yet the truth about human behavior and existence on earth after the fall of humanity is often difficult. The presence of evil in this world is an ugly truth. The intrusion of moral and natural evil into life most frequently generates these difficult truths.⁸⁵ Moral and natural evils result in poverties of resources, relationships, and health. Any of these evils might cause trauma to adults or children. In the face of evil affecting children, historical attempts at theodicy seem absurd. Yet if we understand these evils from the horizon of faith, there is no need for any evil to deprive us of hope⁸⁶ or diminish our view of deity.⁸⁷ Instead, communities ought to generate “practical theodicies” that seek to ameliorate the consequences of evil through practices that enact the virtue of hope.⁸⁸ Specific practical theodicies as responses to various forms of evil follow.

How does one find hope within the stark reality of a poverty of resources? Albino Barrera isolates the critical issues by emphasizing the providence of God in his contrast of the goodness of God’s kingdom with the evil of poverty:

First, material sufficiency, perhaps even in abundance, is intrinsic to the gift of creation. . . . Secondly, the certainty that the earth will provide what people need is founded on God’s unfailing providential care. . . . Third, sufficiency in human

⁸⁵ In the following discussion of evil, I will deal with the pragmatic aspects of practical ministry to those who have caused or suffered from evil. The ontology and nature of evil are notoriously difficult and complex topics beyond the boundaries of this thesis.

⁸⁶ “A healthy view of evil . . . is one that is not only honest in the face of evil but also allows us to retain hope. Denial and despair, by contrast, are unhealthy alternatives to an honest grappling with evil that maintains hope.” Jerry L. Walls, “Outrageous Evil and the Hope of Healing,” in *Immersed in the Life of God: The Healing Resources of the Christian Faith*, essays in honor of William Abraham, ed. Paul L. Gavrilyuk, Douglas M. Koskela, and Jason E. Vickers (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 188.

⁸⁷ Walls, “Outrageous Evil,” 189-92; Nigel S. Wright, *A Theology of the Dark Side: Putting the Power of Evil in Its Place* (Waynesboro, GA: Paternoster, 2003), 55-100.

⁸⁸ Kenneth Surin proposes the term practical theodicy, and Walls discusses its appropriate use. Walls, “Outrageous Evil,” 193-194.

material provisioning is merely conditional. It is provisional on human conduct, particularly on their conformity to the demands of the Kingdom of God.⁸⁹

Yet because many people operate from a perspective of scarcity instead of abundance, they too often hoard, misallocate, steal, and squander resources to guarantee safety or pleasure for themselves instead of owning their responsibility for “human material provisioning.” Barrera connects economic life and righteousness by asserting that God’s community shows its holiness when it yields its own claim on resources in order to meet the needs of others.⁹⁰ Those needs include physical and spiritual safety in the present and hope of a sustainably safe future tomorrow.

Evil may also result from a poverty of relationships, either in quality or quantity. Such poverties stem from class or economic distinctions, racial prejudice, poor social skills, dysfunction (whether individual, familial, or communal), and separation (whether by employment, divorce, imprisonment, or death). Aware of the consequences of such relational poverty, Jesus showed concern for the effects of lost relationship on his mother following his death. While on the cross, Jesus formalized a relationship between Mary and the “disciple Jesus loved,” ensuring relationships and resources for Mary in his physical absence (John 19:25-27). Communities respond appropriately to poverties of relationship by acknowledging the truth of relational loss, avoiding the pretense of replacing unique human relationships, and offering instead new relationships that affirm

⁸⁹ Albino Barrera, *God and the Evil of Scarcity: Moral Foundations of Economic Agency* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005), 133.

⁹⁰ Barrera, *God and the Evil of Scarcity*, 136-38.

the worth of the one experiencing loss.⁹¹ New relationships, or re-invigorated ones, may renew hope.

Among the most recalcitrant truths connected with poverty are the poverties of health and life: illness, disability, and death. These seem to be implacable evils for which there are no adequate theodicies and before which hope seems naïve. Nonetheless, despite the enduring and severe challenges of low IQ, low functioning, poor mental health, obdurate pain, and genetic or traumatic physical abnormalities, those so afflicted remain fully human and capable of experiencing life in a way that is meaningful, if different from others.⁹² This hope abides even when such a one requires a disproportionate expenditure of resources and a special quality of relationships merely to maintain a day-to-day existence or when there appears to be no chance that such a person will achieve a self-sustained lifestyle. When a community hopefully ensures resources and relationships for such people and their families, it prevents further evil and places itself in a position to be blessed by those whom it seeks to serve.⁹³

⁹¹ “Churches have been involved in a variety of forms of work on behalf of children who live in economic poverty and the poverty of tenuous connections. Yet the kind of work that grounds all other effort—that instructs us in the kinds of assistance children need from adult church friends—is what we would call basic pastoral care: a one-on-one relationship with children based on respect for a child as equally worthy in the sight of God.” Couture, *Seeing Children, Seeing God*, 49.

⁹² When children have chronic health conditions, caregivers must monitor quality of life to be alert to the potential development of mental health issues. Dennis Drotar, ed., *Measuring Health-Related Quality of Life in Children and Adolescents: Implications for Research and Practice* (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1998), 330-31. Individuals born with illness or disability are more likely to adapt and find quality of life without intervention; those who experience such challenges later in life are more likely to need proactive counseling. Malachy Bishop, “Quality of Life and Psychosocial Adaptation to Chronic Illness and Acquired Disability: A Conceptual and Theoretical Synthesis,” *The Journal of Rehabilitation* 71, (2005).

⁹³ MaLesia Breeding and Dana Hood, “Let All Children Come: Including Children with Disabilities in Children’s Ministries” (lecture at the Abilene Christian University Summit, Abilene, TX, 2007).

Not all evil stems from poverty. Arguably, the most painful evils inflicted upon humanity result from the willful, amoral choices of human beings. Humans consequently have the potential to experience moral evil both as victim and violator. To avoid one extreme in identifying moral evil, it seems useful to agree with Nigel Wright in refusing to label a person as evil on the basis of one wrongful act: “There is a point at which the quantitative becomes qualitative: a great quantity of actions crosses a threshold, gains a dynamic, acquires an identity that produces the quality of evilness.”⁹⁴ Labels such as “evil” are, in the event of one wrongful act, neither accurate nor helpful.

The opposite temptation in facing moral evil is to excuse obvious evil because of mitigating factors. Response to such temptation requires the community to resist the use of situational, environmental, or hereditary factors as defenses for immoral behavior. Such factors may explain compulsions, but no factor excuses acting upon those compulsions.⁹⁵ Individuals, even children, must accept responsibility for their wrongful speech and action. Lamb advises communities seeking to help those who have been marked as perpetrators to acknowledge the truth of the wrongful act and the longstanding character traits contributing to the act. That community must subsequently understand that negative (even evil) character traits are not necessarily permanent, but capable of transformation. Such a change of these negative character traits is possible because of the good components of the perpetrator’s character that stand in opposition to the evil traits.

⁹⁴ Nigel Wright, *A Theology of the Dark Side*, 1.

⁹⁵ Lamb, *The Trouble with Blame*, 56-87.

No human being is totally evil.⁹⁶ Even so, humans often struggle to understand how relational evil can be a force in the life of apparently “good” people as well as children. Such strugglers do well to heed N. T. Wright’s admonition: “the line between good and evil runs through us all.”⁹⁷ Even those who enter a situation as innocent victims eventually find their moral position in relationships to be more ambiguous than they might like. Volf explains: “The violence ensnares the psyche of the victim, propels its action in the form of defensive reaction, and—robs it of innocence.”⁹⁸ When a wrongful act produces a wrongful response from the victim, it is reasonable for even the victim to experience guilt. Yet some victims experience unwarranted guilt, and the mere denial of that guilt denies the reality, and therefore the integrity, of the victim.⁹⁹ Hope for both victim and perpetrator lies in taking responsibility, pursuing repentance, granting forgiveness, and seeking reconciliation.

Occasionally the evil in a person’s life is only apparently true and not actually so. Courts misjudge, educators miscalculate, psychologists misdiagnose, and communities misinterpret the facts about human beings, coming to false conclusions instead of the truth. The failure of the “friends” of Job exemplifies the consequences of such misjudgments. A community may choose instead to give the accused the benefit of doubt

⁹⁶ Lamb, *The Trouble with Blame*, 85. “Those who work intimately with perpetrators may have to believe in their essential goodness, must need to remind themselves of the once-young victim of circumstances who at one time was this perpetrator.”

⁹⁷ N. T. Wright, *Evil and the Justice of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 39. Volf concurs with N. T. Wright: “From a distance, the world may appear neatly divided into guilty perpetrators and innocent victims. The closer we get, however, the more the line between the guilty and the innocent blurs and we see an intractable maze of small and large hatreds, dishonesties, manipulations, and brutalities, each reinforcing the other.” Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 81.

⁹⁸ Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 80.

⁹⁹ Lamb, *The Trouble with Blame*, 22-55.

by hoping that its interpretations are wrong. Such a gift may open the door for hope and new life for the individual; the community finds itself blessed by one more member.

How does one deal with the strain between truth and hope brought by the ubiquity of evil? Moltmann counsels those caught in the tension between truth and hope to attempt to know God. “Knowledge of God will then anticipate the promised future of God in constant remembrance of the past emergence of God’s election, his covenant, his promises and his faithfulness.”¹⁰⁰ Hope in God becomes hope for a promised future for human beings and their situations. Hope in the power of God, Boersma maintains, includes the expectation that one day God will transform the flawed and inescapably violent hospitality of humans into the perfectly peaceful hospitality of the eschaton.¹⁰¹ Yet hope is not merely fond anticipation of the eschaton, but an active impetus to work in relationship alongside God to change the truth of the current reality into a piece of the promised future. Hope allows the practitioner of hospitality to visualize ways in which the gap between self and others (the strangers) can be bridged, so as to forge a relationship in the present or near future. In Christian hospitality, hope also entails the formation or cultivation of a relationship between the stranger and God.

Although work with children must be truthful, it is also necessary to maintain hope in their lives. Thus while it may be sometimes necessary to note the truth that a

¹⁰⁰ Moltmann, *A Theology of Hope*, 118.

¹⁰¹ Hans Boersma, “Irenaeus, Derrida and Hospitality: On the Eschatological Overcoming of Violence,” *Modern Theology* 19 (April 2003): 163-80. Boersma thus responds to Derrida’s assertion of the impossibility of achieving “pure” and thus non-violent hospitality on any future horizon. Derrida claims that hospitality is not truly open and non-violent unless it can be practiced in such a way that even the person who would come into one’s home to destroy it would be welcome. Since Derrida will not allow the divine, he finds no horizon in the future where that which he defines to be pure hospitality might be possible. Boersma counters Derrida’s truth claim with a hopeful appropriation of the apophatic and kataphatic theologies of Irenaeus to describe God’s perfected and peaceful eschatological hospitality.

child faces an issue that may accurately be described as a dysfunction,¹⁰² a more helpful truth is the promise held forth by a positive psychology developing the strengths and virtues of a young person. Helping young people build successful lives is frequently much more about helping them use their strengths so as to minimize their weaknesses.¹⁰³ This emphasis on hope holds true from the individual parent or practitioner to the familial, programmatic, or community level. Over the last two decades, programs serving young people have moved to accept and enact concepts that help them build hopeful and sustainable futures by focusing on assets instead of deficits.¹⁰⁴ The proper balance of the virtues of truth and hope empowers such progress.

Thus the completed hermeneutic of hospitality consists of three sets of tense dyadic virtues: security and vulnerability, holiness and openness, and truth and hope. We have explored and expanded these dyadic virtues in the order in which Russell presented them in her hermeneutic, but this is not necessarily the order in which we might expect to encounter them in the practice of hospitality. Although all of these virtues have value throughout any phase of hospitality, each of these sets of tense virtues is more prominent within one of the three larger moves of hospitality: welcome, staying, and sending. The virtues of holiness and openness shape the quality of welcome a community shows an outsider and even determine which outsider might gain entry. When the community properly holds holiness and openness in tension, even a person who might be

¹⁰² Such dysfunctions are usually defined by the categories found in American Psychiatric Association, *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, 4th ed. (Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Association, 1994). Hereinafter, APA, *DSM IV*.

¹⁰³ Christopher Peterson and Martin E. P. Seligman, *Character Strengths and Virtues: A Handbook and Classification* (Oxford: American Psychological Association, 2004), 3-5.

¹⁰⁴ Burt, *Building Supportive Communities*, 276-77.

considered an enemy of the community can find welcome and voice within hospitality without endangering the identity of the community. As host and guest dwell together in the hospitable event, the virtues of safety and vulnerability rise to prominence. When the community properly shares resources with its guests, most prominently the resource of power, then the balance between safety and vulnerability allows healthy relationships to form and allows the lives of both host and guest to prosper. Finally, in order for the sending forth of the guest to bring joy and sustainable life for host and guest, somehow they must find the balance between truth and hope. Keen focus of these virtues empowers a truthful recognition of evil as evil, yet finds God-given virtue and hope to navigate a way toward a sustainably improved future.

Consequently, groundwork in theology, philosophy, and the social sciences has produced a hermeneutic of hospitality that assesses a balanced hospitality particularly suited to children. The hermeneutic has three lenses, each holding two virtues of hospitality in tension with the other. First, there must be an evaluation of the balance of openness and holiness of the community. Second, the interpreter must weigh the tension between safety and vulnerability in the situation. Third, the observer must appraise the tense virtues of truthfulness and hopefulness in the conversation and its outcomes. This hermeneutic is useful both for life events and written texts.

A Definition of Hospitality

The diversity of views about hospitality would lead those studying the subject to expect authors to have differing definitions of hospitality. Arthur Sutherland offers a theological definition: “In the light of Jesus’ life, death, resurrection, and return, Christian hospitality is the intentional, responsible, and caring act of welcoming or visiting, in

either public or private places, those who are strangers, enemies, or distressed, without regard for reciprocation.”¹⁰⁵ Sutherland’s words correctly ground hospitality for the Christian in the life and practices of Jesus; he also insightfully notes that for the Christian, hospitality can as readily involve the role of the guest or the host, regardless of whether the other is Christian. His words do not explain, though, what such welcoming or visiting might involve.

Nouwen presents another perspective on hospitality that assumes a certain distance, at least in the beginning, between host and guest:

Hospitality, therefore, means primarily the creation of a free space where the stranger can enter and become a friend instead of an enemy. Hospitality is not to change people, but to offer them space where change can take place. It is not to bring men and women over to our side, but to offer freedom not disturbed by dividing lines. It is not to lead our neighbor into a corner where there are no alternatives left, but to open a wide spectrum of options for choice and commitment.¹⁰⁶

Nouwen expects change to be the product of hospitality. Neither party can know, nor ought to expect, such change will take a particular shape, but they should expect change. Perhaps hospitality is at its best when both host and guest find themselves leaving either as different persons or pursuing a changed course. For Nouwen, hospitality avoids power plays and arbitrarily limited options, yet he does expect, regardless of the choices of host and guest, that they will have formed a relationship in the practice of hospitality.

Leveraging from the work of these theologians, remaining mindful of the vocabulary and hermeneutic of hospitality described thus far, and anticipating the description of biblical hospitality that follows, I propose this definition of hospitality:

¹⁰⁵ Sutherland, *I Was a Stranger*, xiii.

¹⁰⁶ Nouwen, *Reaching Out*, 71-72.

In hospitality, Christians enter a place with the outsider to offer or receive welcome. As host and guest remain together, God enters this community and nurtures life with relationships and resources. This practice approaches justice as it balances the virtues of safety and vulnerability, holiness and openness, truth and hope. Respect calls the community, yet, in the end, love should bind it, even as it sends forth its members toward the perfect hospitality of the eschaton.¹⁰⁷

Significantly, this definition captures the three basic moves of hospitality: entering into, remaining within, and sending out from the hospitable event. It is important to note that this definition does not represent hospitality as it was practiced before Jesus began his ministry. Hospitality as practiced by those who met Jesus was, with rare exception, enacted according to the cultural norms of the ancient Mediterranean cultures depicted above. This definition describes instead hospitality as Jesus reshaped the practice during his ministry. The next section of this chapter will establish that the hospitality Jesus demonstrates becomes the spiritual practice Jesus prescribes for the people of God as they participate in *missio Dei*. Equipped with a useful vocabulary, hermeneutic, and definition of hospitality, I now turn to the biblical text to explore how Jesus accomplishes such a transformation.

Hospitality as a Practice and Virtue of God Serving *Missio Dei*

The biblical canon provides a wealth of narratives describing ancient hospitality. Such texts are ubiquitous and readily identifiable by the writer's use of the language of hospitality within them. Not only can a reader learn from positive narratives of hospitality, but they can also gain much from a reading of texts describing distorted, failed, or restored attempts at hospitality. To make a clearer and more concise case for a

¹⁰⁷ Russell, *Just Hospitality*, 82. This definition is consistent with Russell's requirement that hospitality has "four overlapping central components: (1) unexpected divine presence, (2) advocacy for the marginalized, (3) mutual welcome, and (4) creation of community."

theology of hospitality, examinations of the biblical text in this study will focus on the gospel of Luke.¹⁰⁸ Luke contains numerous narratives describing hospitality (Luke 4:38-44; 5:27-32; 7:36-50; 9:10-17; 10:38-42; 11:37-54; 14:1-24; 19:1-10; 22:7-38; 24:28-32, 36-49).¹⁰⁹ A number of the parables of Jesus address hospitality (Luke 10:25-37; 12:35-40; 13:22-30; 15:11-32; 16:19-31). Additionally, several narratives depict a distorted, confused, or interrupted form of hospitality (Luke 4:1-13; 5:17-26; 9:28-36).

Consequently, Brendan Byrne can fairly assert that in the gospel of Luke, hospitality is a useful “frame of reference for the ministry of Jesus.”¹¹⁰ Yet Luke’s interest in hospitality is not merely narrational, but theological. Byrne explains: “Luke sees the whole life and ministry of Jesus as a ‘visitation’ on God’s part to Israel and the world. From the start this

¹⁰⁸ Aware of the complexities of the scholarly discussions about the authorship, redaction history, historicity, synoptic relationships and genre of this text, I will ascribe it to “Luke,” with no prejudices within this work as to the author’s actual identity. I address the text in its canonical form, bracketing for the purposes of this study all questions of redaction history and historicity. The exegesis in this work is not dependent upon any particular solution to the synoptic problem. I agree with many scholars that Luke and Acts are two volumes from the same author and note that this is important for certain forms and theological terms located in both books. Although not reliant upon the idea that the volumes of Luke-Acts are a particular genre, my readings best cohere with the notion that these books are ancient Hellenistic historiography, more specifically a subcategory of that genre that Gregory Sterling describes as apologetic historiography. “Apologetic historiography is the story of a subgroup of people in an extended prose narrative written by a member of the group who follows the group’s own traditions but Hellenizes them in an effort to establish the identity of the group within the setting of the larger world.” Gregory Sterling, *Historiography and Self-Definition: Josephos, Luke-Acts and Apologetic Historiography* (New York: Brill, 1992), 308. Thus Luke mimics both the narrative of Hebrew Scripture and the style of Hellenistic history while presenting the church as a people equal or superior to that produced by the Greek philosophical tradition. This may explain in part why the narratives of hospitality stand out so clearly in Luke’s writing. The following discussion accesses scholarship from widely varying theological and ecclesiological traditions to show this view of biblical hospitality is not limited to any particular or peculiar offshoot of the Christian tradition. Scripture quotations are from the NRSV; Greek texts are from Nestle-Aland, 27th ed.

¹⁰⁹ Although food and table fellowship are sometimes connected with hospitality, hospitality neither subsumes nor is subsumed by these categories. For insight into food in the ministry of Jesus in Luke, see Robert J. Karris, *Luke: Artist and Theologian* (New York: Paulist Press, 1985), 47-70. For a discussion of table fellowship, see Jerome H. Neyrey, “Ceremonies in Luke-Acts: The Case of Meals and Table Fellowship,” in *The Social World of Luke-Acts: Models for Interpretation*, ed. Jerome H. Neyrey (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1991), 361-87; and Dennis E. Smith, “Table Fellowship as a Literary Motif in the Gospel of Luke,” *JBL* 106 (1987): 613-38.

¹¹⁰ Brendan Byrne, *The Hospitality of God: A Reading of Luke’s Gospel* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2000), 4. Byrne uses a theological definition of hospitality, not first-century language, to select his texts.

raises the question: how will this guest, this visitor be received? The crucial point is that those who do receive him find that he brings them into a much wider sphere of hospitality: the ‘hospitality of God.’”¹¹¹

Hospitality and Jesus

The gospel of Luke describes the God who has been hospitable to the people of God in days past, Jesus as God in the flesh who practices hospitality throughout the gospel narrative, and the coming of the Holy Spirit to continue that hospitality throughout the sequel (Acts) and into the eschaton. Hospitality is consequently a divine virtue, not just in one person, but in all three persons of the Trinity. This study of the hospitality of God begins with the person of the Trinity whose behavior is incarnate and therefore visible to human observers and interpreters: Jesus Christ. An examination of several hospitality narratives in the ministry of Jesus will reveal the language and practice of hospitality as was culturally appropriate among Mediterranean societies, the viability of the hermeneutic of hospitality (developed above) in the interpretation of these narratives, and the unique and transformative approach of Jesus to hospitality within that setting. In broad terms, the behavior of the people surrounding Jesus is descriptive of cultural habits and practices; the behavior of Jesus is prescriptive for the people of God in their subsequent practice.

Jesus at the House of Simon Peter

In Luke 4:38-44, Jesus arrives at Simon’s house. Immediately, two semantic keys, “he entered” (εἰσῆλθεν) and “house” (οἰκίαν), mark this as a hospitality narrative. Yet

¹¹¹ Byrne, *The Hospitality of God*, 4.

Jesus does not find the table ready; instead those in the house tell Jesus that Simon's mother-in-law is ill. Jesus goes into the woman's part of the house and heals her by rebuking her fever.¹¹² As host, she does not choose to rest (*ἀναπαύειν*), but she gets up (*ἀναστᾶσα*) immediately and begins serving (*διηκόνει*) her guests. Fitzmyer finds this to emphasize the complete and immediate nature of the healing,¹¹³ yet it also makes clear the importance of the duties of hospitality. Although some consider this to be an act of gratitude,¹¹⁴ it is possible to see her service as a form of reciprocity. If there is such an exchange, the gifts are incommensurate; healing being immeasurably more valuable than a meal.¹¹⁵ Jesus does not remain idle after the meal; neighbors lead (*ἡγαγον*) the sick to him,¹¹⁶ and he heals them. Yet not all are welcome. "Demons also came out of many, shouting, 'You are the Son of God!'" (v. 41). Jesus stops their speech and rebukes them.

Analysis of this narrative reveals the utility of the hermeneutic of hospitality developed above. The host begins the story in a vulnerable state of health. Making himself vulnerable to her high fever, Jesus brings the woman back to safety by healing

¹¹² Since Jesus rebuked the fever like a demon, Matson asks, "Does Satan stand opposed to the act of hospitality, a subject of theological importance for Luke?" David L. Matson, *Household Conversion Narratives: Pattern and Interpretation* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1996), 58. Osiek and Balch also point out the use of separate space for men and women in first-century households and the custom of men and women dining separately. Carolyn Osiek and David L. Balch, *Families in the New Testament World: Households and House Churches* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1997), 40-41.

¹¹³ Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel according to Luke I-IX*, AB (New York: Doubleday, 1981), 549. Also Darrell L. Bock, *Luke 1:1-9:50*, ECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 437.

¹¹⁴ Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 549; Bock, *Luke*, 437; Joel B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 225.

¹¹⁵ Some of these notions about hospitality and its reciprocal nature are extrapolations of the insights of Jennifer Nicholson. Jennifer Nicholson, "Biblical Hospitality" (lecture, Abilene Christian University Graduate School of Theology alumni luncheon, Abilene, TX, September 23, 2008).

¹¹⁶ Is Luke using the verb *ἡγαγον* in the context of this house to call to mind another technical term for hospitality—*εἰσάγειν ὑπὸ στέγην*? If so, then Jesus effectively acts as the host in the home of another.

her.¹¹⁷ This involves his use of power on her behalf, and though this use of power is benevolent, it is reciprocated; Jesus receives a meal as a consequence. Yet even the meal is redemptive in that it empowers the woman's restored ability to function in a virtuous way; she reciprocates her healing with practices utilizing the power (preparing, serving, and hosting) and resources (food, place, and time) available to her. To minimize the task by calling it servile only diminishes what she and those in her culture considered honorable.¹¹⁸

Community awareness of the truth of intractable illness and the presence of a healer among them causes others to come hoping for healing from Jesus. This household and its hospitable event are open to them, yet that openness is bound by the holiness of Jesus; he expels the demonic. He does not allow the self-serving power of the demons to make victims of the vulnerable any longer. Thus there is release (ἀφῆκεν) for the captive, consistent with the prophecy from Isaiah read by Jesus in the synagogue at the beginning of his ministry (ἀφεσιν, Luke 4:18).¹¹⁹ Jesus brings salvation to this house; the outcome is new life, spiritual and physical, for all who enter. Thus despite the truth of illness and demon possession, Jesus brings the hope of restored life into this hospitable event. At the same time, Jesus pursues the mission of God in these hospitable healings by bringing a physical peace that quiets the disturbance of faith brought by illness and by reviving faith in God's presence and care through revealing the power of God.

¹¹⁷ Mark's account emphasizes that Jesus touches the sick woman (Mark 1:31).

¹¹⁸ Malina and Neyrey, "Honor and Shame," 61-63. Older norms acquired from the Hebrew Scriptures are also important to honor and shame for the woman as host; see Hobbs, "Hospitality in the First Testament," 14-17.

¹¹⁹ Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke*, Sacra Pagina (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1991), 85.

Jesus at the House of Simon the Pharisee

In Luke 7:36-50, the writer narrates an episode of hospitality in the home of Simon the Pharisee. Simon invites Jesus to eat with him, and Jesus enters into the house (εἰσελθὼν εἰς τὸν οἶκον) of the Pharisee. There, Jesus seats himself, or reclines (κατεκλίθη) at the table.¹²⁰ Luke's verbiage marks this event as one of hospitality, yet elements of hospitality go missing without comment from Jesus or Luke until later in the narrative. Unexpected events quickly distort the normal pattern. A woman, known within the community as a "sinner," has learned Jesus dines (φάγη, eats) with the Pharisee.¹²¹ She comes into the house, stands at the feet of Jesus, and begins to cry at his feet. As she continues to weep, she cleans the road-dirtied feet of Jesus with her hair. Thus in honor-shame terms, she has put the height of her feminine pride under the lowest part of Jesus: his feet. She shows honor to Jesus.¹²² Although oil was normally used to anoint the head as a part of hospitality, she anoints his feet with ointment she has brought in an alabaster jar. In the reclined position, this is the part of the body of Jesus she could have reached.¹²³

Simon is not pleased, and Jesus perceives his thoughts: "If this man were a prophet, he would have known who and what kind of woman this is who is touching

¹²⁰ NRSV, "took his place at the table." The verb denotes lying on the side and may imply reclining at a triclinium, a Hellenistic mode of dining. See Johnson, *Luke*, 127. Green, *Luke*, 309.

¹²¹ Green cautions the reader against making too much of the appellation "sinner." He notes that the woman may have merely been unattached to a male and therefore had no one to defend her honor. Green, *Luke*, 309. See also Malina and Neyrey, "Honor and Shame," 63.

¹²² Malina and Neyrey, "Honor and Shame," 55. Osiek and Balch, *Families in the New Testament World*, 40-41, 45.

¹²³ Kenneth E. Bailey, *Through Peasant Eyes*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 7. Bailey notes Luke details the woman bringing the oil, the water, and the kiss into the scene in the reverse order of a normal offering of hospitality; he then focuses on the scene with the woman at the feet of Jesus and also mentions the elements in the appropriate order as the scene moves toward completion.

him,” (Luke 7:39). From Simon’s perspective, rule-breaking is everywhere in this event: the woman has a bad reputation, she has entered the home without invitation, she has entered what this patriarchal society would have perceived to be a masculine place within that home,¹²⁴ she has pulled down her hair among men, and she is touching a man in a way that some may have perceived to be sensual.¹²⁵ Jesus does not respond to any of these objections. Instead, Jesus answers Simon with a narrative correcting Simon’s perspective from one of regulated resources to one of restored relationships: the parable of the Two Debtors.

Jesus then directs the attention of those in the room back to the woman. Jesus clearly marks this as an episode of hospitality by outlining the hospitality offered by the woman as compared to the hospitality of Simon: “I entered your house [εἰσῆλθόν σου εἰς τὴν οἰκίαν]; you gave me no water for my feet, but she has bathed my feet with her tears and dried them with her hair. You gave me no kiss, but from the time I came in she has not stopped kissing my feet. You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment” (Luke 7:44-47). After his invitation to hospitality, Simon does nothing. Women or servants bring the food. Yet this woman is the one who actually extends a hospitable welcome to Jesus. To this woman Jesus extends the forgiveness of sins (ἀφέωνταί σου αἱ ἁμαρτίαι, 7:48) and peace (εἰρήνην, 7:50). To Simon, Jesus gives only a lesson in manners. The hospitality of the Pharisee has been found wanting.¹²⁶

¹²⁴ Malina and Neyrey, “Honor and Shame,” 63.

¹²⁵ Green, *Luke*, 310. See also Robert Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts: A Literary Interpretation*, vol. 1, *The Gospel according to Luke* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986), 116. *Contra* Fitzmyer, *Luke*, vol. 1, 689.

¹²⁶ Fitzmyer asserts, “The Pharisee’s omissions should not be emphasized as signs of impoliteness,” and claims that the woman and Simon are both forgiven by God. Fitzmyer, *Luke*, vol. 1,

An evaluation of this text with the hermeneutic of hospitality brings further insight. Jesus is not invited into a safe place; Simon tests Jesus by offering him less than the cultural norm for hospitality. A host might miss one, perhaps two, components of the culturally coded ceremonies of hospitality, but to miss three seems deliberate. Simon does not eject the uninvited stranger, but leaves her in the room to observe the reaction of Jesus. Simon may be setting up a challenge and riposte game in an attempt to deprive Jesus of honor.¹²⁷ Yet Jesus denies him that victory by pointing out Simon's failure to safely play by his own social rules, and the self-inflicted failure dishonors Simon. Interestingly, Jesus did not at first concern himself with social rules; he did not rebuke Simon's flawed hospitality until Simon considered exclusive "holiness" language against the woman. Jesus anticipates Simon's potential verbal violence against the woman and uses just enough force (Boersma might argue violence) to prevent the greater harm.¹²⁸ Strikingly, this woman who has found no one to defend her honor discovers safety at the feet of Jesus. Although the nominal host thinks ungracious thoughts about her, no one dares speak them now. Jesus makes himself vulnerable to charges of impropriety by creating a safe place in the midst of this inhospitable environment for the woman to act, and she does. She sets aside whatever "truth" has held her back in the community and moves forward in hopes that her efforts will be graciously received; she assumes the role

691. Yet Jesus calls Simon to task for faulty hospitality and extends explicit forgiveness to the woman. Simon seems to neither request nor receive forgiveness at this time. Arterbury agrees with my analysis, *Entertaining Angels*, 138-39.

¹²⁷ Malina and Neyrey, "Honor and Shame," 49.

¹²⁸ Boersma argues that in the midst of the Lukan hospitality narratives Jesus sometimes behaves in ways that are violent as defined above (see my discussion on p. 36-38). *Violence, Hospitality, and the Cross*, 92-93. He also avers that Jesus (and therefore, God) can rightfully use violence in order to achieve justice without such a move being a "morally negative thing." *Violence, Hospitality, and the Cross*, 43-51.

of host. Jesus accepts, and reciprocates in a way that proleptically demonstrates the practice of hospitality he will teach his disciples (Luke 9:1-6; 10:1-12; see below); he offers peace to his true host. Again, Jesus as guest reciprocates in a way incommensurate with the simple, if generous, practices of hospitality offered by his host. He answers with a proclamation that reveals his divine purpose in hospitality. Jesus has come to bring peace between people and their God.

Jesus Feeds the Five Thousand

Jesus continues to connect the mission of God and hospitality in the feeding of the five thousand (Luke 9:10-17).¹²⁹ This time, though, Jesus serves as the host. As the apostles return from their first missional excursion, Jesus attempts to withdraw with them when a large crowd begins to follow. Jesus welcomes (ἀποδεξάμενος) the crowd, teaches them about the kingdom of God (βασιλείας τοῦ θεοῦ), and heals those in need. At the end of the day, the apostles attempt to short circuit hospitality for the outsiders by urging Jesus to dismiss (ἀπόλυσον) the crowd into the surrounding small communities so they can find lodging (καταλύσωσιν) there. Thus instead of providing lodging and sending (προπέμπω) the crowd on their journey after being warmed and filled, the apostles decide to dismiss over five thousand people to seek their own dinner in what they affirm to be a deserted place (ἐρήμῳ).¹³⁰ The advice of the apostles is perilously parallel with Micaiah's

¹²⁹ This is the only miracle Jesus performs in Galilee that all four gospel accounts describe. For an analysis of the relationships between these texts, see Fitzmyer, *Luke*, vol. 1, 761-64.

¹³⁰ Fitzmyer thinks finding food for so many in such a place creates a problem to be solved; *Luke*, vol. 1, 766. Others speak as if this deserted place is close enough to a city for this not to be problematic; Green, *Luke*, 363; and Johnson, *Luke*, 146; Bock, *Luke*, 830. A city or group of villages would need to be quite sizable, though, to feed and lodge over 5,000 visitors without any notice at day's end. Bock, however, argues one is "overreading" the text if one does not think at least some of the crowd is local. Even so, Bock assumes that locals have food and time to prepare it for themselves; the remnant who are outsiders are

description of Israel in 1 Kings 22:17: “I saw all Israel scattered on the mountains, like sheep that have no shepherd; and the Lord said, ‘These have no master; let each one go home in peace.’”¹³¹ For those whom the apostles have not elected to eat with them, this injunction to find one’s own lodging and peace would indeed be violent hospitality.

These people, though, have a shepherd who will feed his sheep. Jesus reshapes hospitality for his followers in the most radical terms. He rejects the “economy of violence” his apostles unwittingly adopt; he chooses instead to enact the economy of God.¹³² He accomplishes this with a simple imperative: you give them something to eat (φαγεῖν). Despite finding their resources to be inadequate by at least three orders of magnitude (five loaves of bread and two fish, ἄρτοι πέντε καὶ ἰχθύες δύο),¹³³ Jesus proceeds to lead the apostles in their role as hosts. Instructing the apostles to have the crowd sit (κατακλίνετε) in groups of fifty, they do so. Jesus takes the available resources, looks to heaven and the God who provides for this hospitality as he blesses the meager supply, and then gives it to the apostles to distribute.¹³⁴ In the economy of the kingdom,

carrying enough money to purchase a meal; the communities have adequate resources to provide those meals for outsiders; and the surge in demand would not have undue economic effect (an increase in prices, where not all persons would be able to purchase a meal).

¹³¹ Fitzmyer, *Luke*, vol. 1, 763.

¹³² Bieler and Schottroff discuss the contrast between the divine economy and the economy of violence. “These huge numbers are mentioned in order to make clear that God’s bread is sufficient for all, no matter how many: the whole nation, the whole of humanity must be satisfied, and all creation must enjoy its fullness. Even the fragments that are left over after the meal make clear what abundance the divine economy creates. . . . In a globalized economy in which the strong wage a war of distribution against the weak, the fragments are to be thrown away. The strong and the wealthy are to consume, to have an excess and throw it away; this drives the economy.” Andrea Bieler and Luise Schottroff, *The Eucharist: Bodies, Bread and Resurrection* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2007), 77.

¹³³ Bock, *Luke*, vol. 1, 830-31; Tannehill, *Luke*, 216. Both Bock and Tannehill note the contrast between the apostle’s ability to provide and that of Jesus to obtain providence from God.

¹³⁴ “In lifting his eyes to heaven, Jesus had recognized God as the source of this meal, that is, as the gracious Benefactor of these needy people.” Green, *Luke*, 365. Although Green notes, “the vocabulary

each shares with the other as if they were family and depends upon God to somehow make this enough.¹³⁵ Through no normal economic means, though, this meal satisfies all, and leftovers are plentiful.¹³⁶ Johnson summarizes the divine economy expressed here: “abundance is found not in the power to purchase with money, but in the power of the Lord; and those who give receive back even more extravagantly.”¹³⁷ The economics of this hospitable event seem even more unusual when one remembers the host is homeless (Luke 9:58). Jesus may have built homes and tables, but he does not own either, nor does he want either to circumscribe counterproductive limits to his hospitality. Jesus takes hospitality beyond the boundaries of the house (οἶκος) and transforms it into a practice that requires space, but not a particular place. The grassy hills of Galilee form the “dining room” of Jesus, so that undefined space becomes a place for plenty to recline. It is not by chance that economic considerations enter into this narrative; economics and hospitality are overlapping domains, both of which require resources.

The spiritual content of this meal is even richer than the economic. This hospitable event and its natural setting evoke memories of Eden, reveal God’s providence in the present, and anticipate the restoration of God’s people at the great eschatological banquet. The practice of Jesus in this event thus reveals the common theme of past,

of ‘service at the table’ is missing,” he affirms Luke’s language is consistent with the vocabulary of hospitality he uses in other locations (10:8; 11:6; Acts 16:34). *Luke*, 364.

¹³⁵ Pohl explains: “Hospitality meant extending to strangers a quality of kindness usually reserved for friends and family.” *Making Room*, 19; see also Joel B. Green, *Theology of the Gospel of Luke*, New Testament Theology (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 112-17.

¹³⁶ Johnson, *Luke*, 149. He connects this feeding narrative with the account of God’s providence of manna to the people of Israel in Exodus 16:4-36; God gave that abundance of bread in a desert place as a practice of divine hospitality to the people on their pilgrim journey as strangers in the land. Biehler and Schottroff note that God gave in abundance, but defined boundaries to prevent waste. *Eucharist*, 77.

¹³⁷ Johnson, *Luke*, 149. Johnson goes on to assert that the apostles should have learned these lessons on their missionary journey.

present, and future in the story of God: God shares hospitality with God's people.

Semantic markers of hospitality emerge in abundance in this narrative, both in the flawed hospitality the apostles offer and in the kingdom hospitality Jesus practices. Yet Luke also establishes the concept of bread (ἄρτος) as an important marker of hospitality and the economy of God, and highlights the connection between the practice of hospitality and the mission of Jesus.¹³⁸ First Jesus sends the apostles on a missional journey where they engage in hospitality and healing while bringing the peace of the kingdom (Luke 9:1-6), and then he models this form of ministry in the midst of this large crowd: teaching about the kingdom of God, healing the sick, and offering hospitality to the people.

The hermeneutic of hospitality's lenses bring this text into sharp focus. Safety becomes a concern when Jesus makes the inclusive decision to share resources with this large crowd, thus making Jesus and the twelve vulnerable to the same circumstances experienced by these outsiders. Such a decision shows solidarity between the community of Jesus and the crowd and avoids exclusivity. Even though Jesus had sought to withdraw with his apostles for private time in a separate place, he does not hesitate to remain open to those outsiders who seek to come near him. This openness stands in stark contrast to Jewish holiness considerations. As Green has observed, the gathering is open; no mention whatsoever is made of holiness practices, whether of ceremonial and dietary cleanliness or of requisite tithes and washings.¹³⁹ Although Luke does not describe the truth about this crowd's view of its own spiritual condition, the words of Jesus about the peace

¹³⁸ Green agrees to the connection with the kingdom of God. *Luke*, 365. Tannehill connects this narrative to God's reign and to the mission of Jesus (and therefore, the mission of God). *Luke*, 217-19.

¹³⁹ Green, *Luke*, 365.

brought by the kingdom of God surely give them hope.¹⁴⁰ That hope is validated when Jesus demonstrates God's purpose, power, and kingdom are proximate enough to provide food for their dinner when just moments before such a hope seemed unrealistic based on the known economic realities.

Jesus and Zacchaeus

A text that conclusively connects hospitality with the *missio Dei* is the narrative of Jesus and Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1-10). Jesus enters (εἰσελθὼν) Jericho and makes his way through the crowd. As a “distant outsider,” Zacchaeus is highly motivated though physically challenged in his attempts to see Jesus.¹⁴¹ Jesus seeks him out in the crowd. He calls Zacchaeus by name and invites himself to share hospitality with the tax collector: “I must stay at your house” (ἐν τῷ οἴκῳ σου δεῖ με μένειν). Zacchaeus was happy to welcome (ὑπεδέξατο) Jesus and rushed to receive him. The choice of Jesus to lodge with (καταλῦσαι) this sinner meets with the universal disapproval of those watching.¹⁴² As if intuitively sensing the reason for their objections, Zacchaeus promises restitution of his unethical gains and makes provision for generous care for the poor.¹⁴³ Pleased that

¹⁴⁰ Volf has noted that Jesus “lashed out against religious mechanisms which produced sinners where there were none.” This included “his rejection of the laws of purity (Mark 7:1-23),” which arbitrarily created the designations righteous and sinner in this culture. The ministry of Jesus thus becomes good news and cause for hope. Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 113-14.

¹⁴¹ Bock, *Luke*, vol. 2, 1517.

¹⁴² Green, *Luke*, 667-668. Green comments that in the selection of Zacchaeus by Jesus, “Luke pulls the rug from under every cliché, every formula by which people’s status before God might be calculated.”

¹⁴³ Fitzmyer believes that the complete verbal exchange (through v. 10) took place in front of the crowd. *Luke*, vol. 2, 1221; so also Johnson, *Luke*, 285; Tannehill, *Luke*, 124. It is also possible this dialogue takes place before or after dinner at the house of Zacchaeus and in the presence of other witnesses. Bock considers this, as well as other options, but ultimately agrees with Fitzmyer *et al.* since the conversation seems to imply an audience; *Luke*, vol. 2, 1519.

Zacchaeus has discovered “economic justice”¹⁴⁴ in the appropriate use of possessions, Jesus responds, “Today salvation has come to this house” (σήμερον σωτηρία τῷ οἴκῳ τούτῳ ἐγένετο). Luke rarely uses σωτηρία, but here as elsewhere (Luke 1:69, 71, 77) it describes a restoration of relationship between God and God’s people.¹⁴⁵

This pronouncement story, Tannehill asserts, intends to change its hearers in two ways: “To the excluded it is invitation and reassurance, although repentance may be required. To the religious community which has defined itself in ways that exclude many, it is a challenge to change from rejection to acceptance.”¹⁴⁶ Such inclusion and acceptance requires hospitality. “The Son of Man has come to seek and save the lost,” and the divine means to do this has been the practice of hospitality by Jesus, God in the flesh.¹⁴⁷ Both Green and Tannehill find the hospitality narratives involving the tax collectors in Luke (Levi, 5:27-32, and Zacchaeus, 19:1-10) to mark the character of the mission of Jesus: to seek and save the marginalized.¹⁴⁸ His missional method is hospitality.

Examining the text about Zacchaeus through the hermeneutical lenses of this work reveals safety and vulnerability to be primary issues. Climbing the tree exposes Zacchaeus to minute physical safety concerns compared to the social safety issues to which he subjects himself. To run and climb trees to see Jesus does not convey the

¹⁴⁴ Green, *Luke*, 671.

¹⁴⁵ Bock, *Luke*, vol. 2, 1522.

¹⁴⁶ Tannehill, *Luke*, 125.

¹⁴⁷ “This final statement [“the Son of Man . . .”] turns the story of Zacchaeus into a key example of Jesus’ mission as a whole, which is concerned with restoring the outcasts of Israel to their rightful place as participants in the salvation promised in Scripture.” Tannehill, *Luke*, 125.

¹⁴⁸ Green, *Theology of the Gospel of Luke*, 84-86; Tannehill, *Luke*, 106-7.

gravitas that is appropriate for a chief tax collector and a person of some considerable political power. The joy of Zacchaeus enacts a humanity more childlike than adult, and his behavior renders him vulnerable to rejection by both Jesus and the crowd. Jesus honors the vulnerability of Zacchaeus by reciprocating it; Jesus makes his honor vulnerable to the extent that he seeks hospitality at the house of this eager but socially unacceptable person. Zacchaeus deepens his vulnerability when he allows it to reshape his life and life practices by changing his use of possessions. As large as is this gift from Zacchaeus, Jesus exceeds it in bringing the incommensurate gift of salvation to this house, thus covering the vulnerability of Zacchaeus with divine safety.

Through this experience of hospitality, Jesus empowers an outsider instead of maintaining the power that was his. Although it may seem incongruous that a rich, politically potent tax collector should need empowerment,¹⁴⁹ the exuberance of Zacchaeus at the opportunity to extend hospitality to one of his own people signals the rarity of hospitality at his house and the extent to that he is marginalized among his own people.¹⁵⁰ Pohl has noted the claim of some that asserts one should not expect the outcast or the oppressed to extend hospitality, lest the poverty connected with that oppression is

¹⁴⁹ The people in the community of Zacchaeus almost certainly view him to be an oppressor. Yet this is precisely the problem Volf identifies with the designations of “oppressed” and “oppressor.” “It is simply not the case that one can construe narratives of the encounter between parties in conflict as stories of manifest evil on the one side and indisputable good on the other. . . . The longer the conflict continues the more both parties find themselves sucked into the vortex of mutually reinforcing victimization, in which the one party appears more virtuous only because, being weaker, it has less opportunity to be cruel.” Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 103; see also 111-18.

¹⁵⁰ Johnson lists tax collectors (7:29), friends of Jesus (7:35; 15:1-3), Peter (5:8), Levi the tax collector (5:27), the “sinful” woman (7:36), exorcized women (8:3), and Zacchaeus (19:9) as being outcasts. “The thematic statements designating the poor specify them as outcasts; the narrative shows us that this poverty is not an economic designation, but a designation of spiritual status. The tax-collectors could certainly be called ‘rich’ in economic terms, but though they had money, they did not have acceptance.” Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Literary Function of Possessions in Luke-Acts*, SBL Dissertation Series 39 (Missoula, MT: Scholars, 1977), 138-39. Moxnes agrees; Halvor Moxnes, *The Economy of the Kingdom: Social Conflict and Economic Relations in Luke’s Gospel*, Overtures to Biblical Theology (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988), 52.

intensified. Using the story of Zacchaeus, she argues instead that allowing the outsider to be host empowers them to more fully use the gifts that they have been given.¹⁵¹ A failure to allow the outsider the role of host and rejection of the role of guest at his or her table actually disempowers and marginalizes the outsider further. Jesus, though, invites Zacchaeus to generously use his financial resources as his personal strength in hospitality. The move of Jesus to relinquish power to Zacchaeus so as to empower his hospitality and share his experience of marginality permits the renewal of a hospitable relationship between this son of Abraham and his God, and between this outsider and the other children of Abraham. Yet such a risky move is not intuitively obvious. Others might expect liberation to demand freedom before fellowship; Volf asserts, though, that love has primacy over freedom.¹⁵² As Jesus courageously offers a vulnerable love to Zacchaeus, he empowers the “oppressor” to liberate those whom he has oppressed, leads the oppressor to find deliverance from his own oppression,¹⁵³ and initiates healing between the alienated parties.

The second and third hermeneutical lenses bring insight as well. Unless one understands the mission of God to require God and God’s people remain open to those estranged from God, Jesus seems susceptible to charges that he is less than holy and too open to outsiders by choosing to lodge with this sinner.¹⁵⁴ Then, too, the holy behavior of

¹⁵¹ Pohl, *Making Room*, 121-23.

¹⁵² Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 105.

¹⁵³ Ogletree, *Hospitality to the Stranger*, 143. On this point Ogletree concurs: “Our response to the claims of the kingdom involves our freedom with respect to property. That same freedom permits us to apprehend its communal meaning.” Here, Zacchaeus “apprehends” the “communal meaning” of property.

¹⁵⁴ Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life*, 258. Moltmann explains, “Jesus received sinners and sat down at table with them. He got himself into ‘bad company’.” The innermost reason was his overflowing joy in the approaching kingdom of God. That is why he celebrated the messianic feast with the people who had been

this true “son of Abraham” reveals to the reader that holiness, or the lack thereof, is neither permanent nor always perceptible by human eyes. The crowd sees only the truth of the history of this “sinner,” and they fail to see the life-changing hope the kingdom of God brings through the person of Jesus. The crowd’s haste to judge based on apparent historical truth results in a self-imposed separation from a hopeful celebration at the table with God in the flesh and from the blessing of salvation given to all in the house of Zacchaeus.

The Teaching of Jesus

Hospitality is important to the practice of ministry for Jesus and in his teaching, as well. In his parables, Jesus plainly describes the kingdom in terms of hospitality. Some parables heighten the positives of just hospitality by contrasting them with the negatives of inhospitality. Luise Schottroff, for example, avers that in the parables an excess of resources endangers the individual’s relationship with God, and an extreme lack of resources puts one’s relationship with God at risk of “breaking.”¹⁵⁵ The parable of the rich man and Lazarus brings both of these extremes into clear relief (Luke 16:19-31). Such extremes also endanger the individual’s connection with community. Yet Jesus speaks positively about his hospitable kingdom as well: the Great Supper (Luke 14:15-24), the Lost Sheep (Luke 15:1-7), the Lost Coin (Luke 15:8-10), and the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32). Narratives that identify those who miss the mark for a just hospitality

thrust out of society. In inviting joy, he opened himself for them, and respected both them and the poor, as the first children of the divine grace that creates everything afresh.”

¹⁵⁵ Luise Schottroff, *The Parables of Jesus*, trans. Linda M. Maloney (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2006). For a discussion of the issues with an excess of resources, see pages 165-68; for a discussion about the lack of resources, see page 206.

include the Rich Man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31), and the Wicked Husbandmen (Luke 20:9-18). Although God's table is open for all, not all will choose to sit at it. Even though the king offers some guests particular invitations, they, too, will decline.

The Material and Metaphorical Practice of Hospitality by Jesus

The texts examined thus far have shown Jesus engaging in and teaching about concrete acts of hospitality: entering homes, receiving hospitality, sitting at the table, blessing food, breaking bread, and remaining in fellowship. Yet it is critical to understand the hospitality of Jesus to be both material and metaphorical. Some of his actions extend beyond the concrete to the metaphorical: restoring relationship, forgiving sin, and speaking the peace of God. Hospitality in the ministry of Jesus dances on the boundary between literal behavior and figurative function. Yet over all, the practice of hospitality by Jesus comes to stand as a metaphor of the vulnerability, openness,¹⁵⁶ and hopefulness found in relationship with God, where previously only a select few have found safety, holiness, and truth unopposed. In Luke's account, the practice and metaphor of hospitality are so prevalent that it becomes credible to assert hospitality is what Paul Ricoeur terms an "insistent metaphor."¹⁵⁷ As such, hospitality's flexibility, centrality, and ubiquity mark it as a useful rubric of the ministry of Jesus.

¹⁵⁶ I am using the term "openness" here to describe receptivity to conversation and relationship, particularly with the outsider. I am aware of the theological debates over the "openness" of God as relates to time, knowledge, and power. I am not making such claims here, but would note rather the theology developed in this work neither requires nor rejects that particular kind of openness.

¹⁵⁷ Paul Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning* (Fort Worth: Texas Christian University Press, 1976), 68. "Can we not then call insistent metaphors—those metaphors which are closest to the symbolic depths of our existence—metaphors that owe their privilege of revealing what things are like to their organization into networks and hierarchical levels?" Boersma finds hospitality to be such a significant Christian metaphor that he uses it in his effort to reclaim the usefulness of several other metaphors used in various atonement theories. Boersma, *Violence, Hospitality and the Cross*.

While person after person shares hospitality with Jesus throughout Luke's narrative, that material relationship with the incarnate Jesus is metaphorical for the relationship with the God who sent Jesus. Thus pattern of practice connects with mission. "Jesus Christ is the primary pattern of God's welcome," says Amy Oden. "Through God's incarnation in Jesus Christ, God's welcome is made plain as the welcome of human life itself into the divine life."¹⁵⁸ As Jesus receives hospitality from all types and classes of people through the course of his life and as he offers hospitality and welcome to others, the conclusion of Childers and Aquino about the ministry of Jesus seems logical: "In a sense, the ministry of Jesus is one of hospitality."¹⁵⁹

This ministry of hospitality empowers a divine sharing with humanity that goes to unexpected places and entails unexpected events. God comes to participate in this world as a fully human person, not only to experience birth, breath, eating, drinking, and conversation with other humans, but also to share in human suffering, even in death. Jürgen Moltmann asserts "we first of all discover along Jesus' way to this death on the cross a *solidarity christology*: the messianic Son of God unreservedly takes on himself the conditions of our vulnerable and mortal existence, and becomes a human being like us."¹⁶⁰ Miroslav Volf takes Moltmann's concept to the unexpected extreme; he contends that God intends through this solidarity to invite those who are "other," those who are

¹⁵⁸ Amy Oden, *God's Welcome: Hospitality for a Gospel-Hungry World* (Cleveland: Pilgrim, 2008), 105.

¹⁵⁹ Jeff Childers and Frederick Aquino, *Unveiling Glory: Visions of Christ's Transforming Presence* (Abilene, TX: ACU Press, 2003), 92.

¹⁶⁰ Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life*, 130. Emphasis and capitalization by Moltmann. Hall concurs: "A Creator who through loving and liberating participation in the creaturely condition would redeem it 'must' (once the decision has been taken) follow the creature through to the nonbeing toward which all creaturely being moves—that end, let us already note, which does not come only at the end of life but is deeply embedded in human consciousness all the way through." John Douglas Hall, *The Cross in Our Context: Jesus and the Suffering World* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2003), 39.

God's enemies and our enemies, and even those who are the oppressors, into a restoration of divine fellowship as well. "As God does not abandon the godless to their evil but gives the divine self for them in order to receive them into divine communion through atonement, so also should we—whoever our enemies and whoever we may be."¹⁶¹

The behavior of Jesus is not merely descriptive of the divine character of hospitality and impulse to solidarity; the hospitable actions of Jesus are also prescriptive models of concrete and metaphorical practices of hospitality for his disciples.¹⁶² Those practices tend to develop certain virtues that, when achieved in community, develop a kind of communal character including hospitality. When the community of God is appropriately hospitable in literal, visible acts, then it will gradually learn to value certain virtues: safety, vulnerability, openness, holiness, truthfulness, and hopefulness. As God's community acquires these virtues, it will also acquire a character of hospitality that cannot be obtained from any one act.¹⁶³ This attribution of character is metaphorical, but it becomes concrete again in the sense that such character leads to engagement in other concrete acts. These concrete acts stem from the community's development of a communal consciousness of the virtues and concepts of hospitality, leading the community to apply those virtues to other situations that might not be within the denotative meaning and vocabulary of hospitality. Thus hospitality becomes a metaphorical rubric for engaging a much broader range of practices than would normally

¹⁶¹ Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 23.

¹⁶² For a helpful discussion of metaphor and model as it relates to the ministry of Jesus, see Boersma, *Violence, Hospitality and the Cross*, 99-114.

¹⁶³ This will be discussed on p. 80-87.

be found in any typical definition of hospitality, whether first-century Mediterranean or twenty-first-century cosmopolitan.

Jesus, as we have seen, received and offered hospitality (both concrete and metaphorical) over the span of his ministry. He also engaged in table talk clearly verbalizing his practice of hospitality. In the process, Jesus took hospitality as understood and practiced in his context and reshaped it according to a divine agenda: that of God and God's eschatological banquet. How God the Creator and God the Spirit participate in this hospitality follows.

God and Providence

Although the personage of the Trinity most prominent in Luke's narrative is Jesus, Yahweh and the Holy Spirit are both present and active (Luke 3:21-22). Jesus remains in constant dialogue with these persons (Luke 10:21; 22:42; 23:34, 46), and he speaks of them as a part of his conversation and teaching. It is when Jesus speaks in parables that Luke records most clearly the hospitality of God as a part of the divine economy.

The Prodigal Son

Although the parable best known as the parable of the Prodigal Son is multivalent and subject to several viable readings,¹⁶⁴ one of the most prominent readings presents the

¹⁶⁴ Craig L. Blomberg, *Interpreting the Parables* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1990), 173-79. Not only is it possible to read this parable in different ways; Nouwen shows that the parable is capable of "reading" its listener in various ways. Henri J. M. Nouwen, *The Return of the Prodigal Son: A Story of Homecoming* (New York: Doubleday, 1992).

father-figure in this narrative as God, or at least God-like (Luke 15:11-32).¹⁶⁵ How might God appear if the interpreter reads this text with a hermeneutic of hospitality? The parent in this parable has evidently long been the provider of a hospitality of sorts: resources and relationships that were life-giving to this child. Yet the child chooses to become a stranger, suffering under the illusion that life is an independent enterprise and, through a self-induced misperception, equating having resources with being able to supply them.¹⁶⁶ Instead of remaining in the house (evidently there were standards in the house, perhaps even standards of holiness), the youth exits the home. Somehow a false hope not tested by the realities of this world makes the sustainability of the youth's lifestyle believable. Without any concerns for accountability, the youth uses newly discovered power to go to another place and provide pseudo-hospitality for those who turn out to be uninterested in real relationship. The kind of hospitality chosen requires an expenditure of fiscal power that is inappropriately kenotic. Eventually, this emptying goes beyond vulnerability to bring self-inflicted victimization and suffering instead of safety. There is no money, no food, no clothing but that being worn, and no place.¹⁶⁷ Ultimately, when resources and

¹⁶⁵ Fitzmyer says, "The parable presents the loving father as a symbol of God himself." *Luke*, vol. 2, 1085. Green points out that the father image is "primary" in the Lukan travel narrative: "Against the interpretive horizons of the Roman world, wherein the characteristic attributes of the father as the paterfamilias are remembered especially in terms of authoritarianism and legal control, the picture Luke paints is remarkable for its counteremphasis on care and compassion." *Luke*, 579. Schottroff disagrees. She sees that this person does have divine attributes even though she does not believe this father represents God. Schottroff, *Parables*, 138-51. Even if we concede her point, this parable can still potentially tell us something about the nature of God's hospitality.

¹⁶⁶ Bock discusses the child's access to parental property, noting some make mention of a precedent for a premature disbursement of assets, while others claim this was only appropriate at the death of the parent. Bock, *Luke*, vol. 2, 1309-10. Bailey disputes any precedent for a living distribution of an estate, and asserts, "the younger brother's request amounts to wishing his father's death." Kenneth E. Bailey, *Poet and Peasant* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 165. In any case, Bock notes, "the son clearly looks to sever his relationship to his father and go away." *Luke*, vol. 2, 1310.

¹⁶⁷ This is oddly parallel to the demands of Luke 10:1-12 upon the disciples. The difference is one of relationship with providence.

relationships are exhausted and even life is in the balance, the fundamental returns to significance: bread. Bread, the symbol of life, of wisdom, and of hospitality, becomes the desire of this lost young person. The question is how to get it. The youth has abandoned the status and relationship of offspring; to an alienated outsider, the hope of hospitality seems too high and holy from the harsh truth and muck of the pig pen.¹⁶⁸ The prodigal chooses to return and ask for a job. After all, even the servants back home have “bread enough and to spare” (περισσεύονται ἄρτων).

The provider still fully supplies the needs of those under the roof of providence. Even though it seems impossible to explain how this economy works, the parent gives away and yet still has enough to care for the needs of those who choose to remain, no matter what their role.¹⁶⁹ Power and kenosis appear to be in perfect balance. Resources abound. Relationships are healthy. Life is good. To be a servant here is better than what appears to be a life of freedom elsewhere. While members of this community remain vulnerable human beings, this is a safe place.

The youth chooses to return; there is no imposition of power or violence by the parent to bring the prodigal unwillingly home.¹⁷⁰ Instead, the free choice of return and

¹⁶⁸ “To tend the pigs of a Gentile is about as alienated as a Jew could imagine being.” Johnson, *Luke*, 237. So also Bock, *Luke*, vol. 2, 1310-11.

¹⁶⁹ It is interesting that many, even those who assert parables should not be taken as allegories, go to some considerable effort to figure out the legal and economic consequences of this distribution and donation of property. Neither Jesus nor Luke bothers to explain. Johnson says it well: “The legal niceties of inheritance here are secondary to storytelling.” Johnson, *Luke*, 236. Others concur: Fitzmyer, *Luke*, vol. 2, 1086; Blomberg, *Interpreting the Parables*, 176.

¹⁷⁰ Boersma, *Violence, Hospitality, and the Cross*, 26. Speaking of the love of this parent, Nouwen observes, “It cannot force, constrain, push, or pull. It offers the freedom to reject that love or to love in return. It is precisely the immensity of the divine love that is the source of the divine suffering.” Nouwen, *Return of the Prodigal*, 95.

repentance empowers a rebirth of relationship.¹⁷¹ The meeting of the parental host and the young stranger brings exuberant, even lavish, hospitality. There is the coming home (ἦλθεν πρὸς τὸν πατέρα), there is welcoming embrace and kiss (ἐπέπεσεν ἐπὶ τὸν τράχηλον αὐτοῦ καὶ κατεφίλησεν), there are clothes (στολήν) to replace those still reeking of the pig pen. Resources now abound. A hot meal is not enough; the fatted calf meets his fate while servants prepare the house.¹⁷² There is celebration.

The extension of openness in hospitality does not, however, always bring happiness to the entire community. The elder sibling comes to the house (ἤγγισεν τῇ οἰκίᾳ), hears music and dancing, calls to a servant who explains, but still does not wish to enter (οὐκ ἤθελεν εἰσελθεῖν) the place of hospitality. For this older child, such hospitality seems extravagant and a violation of the boundaries, even that of holiness. There is the possibility that with the return of this young upstart, fears have arisen about the safety of the remnant of the estate and about a new vulnerability to a diminishment of power and favor.¹⁷³ Although the house is open, entry is refused. The compassionate parent comes out (ἐξελθὼν) to invite and persuade but hears nothing but angry complaints. Luke therefore brings parental compassion into strong relief against the anger of the sibling.¹⁷⁴ The complaints center on a perceived lack of justice (a form of holiness) in parental hospitality and reveal an unwillingness to understand grace (a form of openness) as godly

¹⁷¹ Bock, *Luke*, vol. 2, 1314. “With repentance comes reconciliation.”

¹⁷² The host “decides on the killing/butchering of a chicken or two (for 2-4 guests), or a duck (for 5-8), or a kid (10-15 acceptances), or a sheep (if there at 15-35 people), or a calf (35-75).” Bailey, *Through Peasant Eyes*, 94. Therefore, the fatted calf dinner is a particularly grand gesture if Bailey is correct. This does not mean that the dinner led to gluttony or waste, but rather hints that a number of neighbors were invited to be guests for this celebration. See also Bailey, *Through Peasant Eyes*, 186-87.

¹⁷³ Bock, *Luke*, vol. 2, 1316-17.

¹⁷⁴ Green, *Luke*, 584.

justice. The older child distances himself from sibling and parent with language, “your son,” but the parental response is firm while conciliatory, “your brother.”¹⁷⁵ Nonetheless, the elder is not willing to rejoin the hospitality of the house as long as the younger remains. “He is alienated even though he never left home,” observes Johnson.¹⁷⁶ The story ends with both standing outside the door, parent suffering with unreconciled child.

God as Provider and Host

The symbolic representation of God in the parable of the prodigal presents God as a hospitable God. God provides resources to the just and the unjust. God offers relationship to all; some accept, some reject. This providing, connecting aspect of the hospitality of God is found elsewhere in Luke. In the midst of a long teaching discourse (Luke 12:13-34), Jesus is interrupted by an incongruous request from a man seeking free legal advice on a disputed family estate. Jesus cautions the young man about greed, warns against improper use of possessions with a parable, and then describes a relationship with God rooted in faith in God’s providence. Jesus contrasts the fool who trusts in an accumulation of possessions with the faithful who use what they need and share the excess with the less fortunate. Key words in this text are life (12:15, 19, 20, 22, 23), goods (12:18), possessions (12:33), treasures (12:21, 33, 34), barns (12:18, 24), and eating and drinking (12:19, 22-24, 29).¹⁷⁷ Although neither the use of possessions nor

¹⁷⁵ Bock, *Luke*, vol. 2, 1318-20; Green, *Luke*, 585. This distancing from the family is similar to that found in the hypothetical child’s voice in Deuteronomy: “God has commanded you,” language that avoids participation in the covenant. There the parent reminds the child that he or she belongs to a community, “We were Pharaoh’s slaves” (Deut 6:20-21). The inclusive parental language in the parable has similar aim: “We had to celebrate.”

¹⁷⁶ Johnson, *Luke*, 238. Green says, “his refusal to enter his own home is also a refusal to share in the meal, a symbolic act of gargantuan proportions in a culture where kinship boundaries are secured through the sharing of food.” Green, *Luke*, 584-85.

hospitality subsumes the other, they are overlapping spheres of ethical importance to Christians. In this passage, Jesus warns against reliance on possessions and counsels instead dependence upon the gift-giving hospitality of God. In an upcoming episode of divine history, though, Luke will describe the ability to rely upon a greater gift from God: the opportunity to host an indwelling Spirit (Acts 2:38).

The Holy Spirit as Holy Guest

With the coming of the church, Jesus no longer dwells with his people physically, yet he sends his Holy Spirit to dwell with them spiritually, to be the welcomed guest indwelling his people (2 Tim 1:14; 1 Pet 4:14; 1 John 3:24; 4:13). There are, however, several previews of the Spirit as guest given in Luke's gospel. The Spirit filled John the Baptist before his birth (1:15). God filled Elizabeth with the Spirit so that she might be able to perceive Mary's pregnancy with Jesus (1:41-45). After Zechariah regained his voice, he prophesied about Jesus while in the Spirit (1:67). The Spirit told Simeon of a coming savior, sustained him until that day, and guided him to Jesus so that Simeon might proclaim Jesus to be the salvation of God (2:25-32). The Spirit came upon Jesus at his baptism (3:22) and remained with him through his ministry (4:1, 14, 18; 10:21). Jesus promised his people that if they would ask God for the Holy Spirit, God would give the Spirit to them (11:13). Jesus also counseled his disciples not to have fear about what they might say when confronted by worldly powers because the Holy Spirit would teach them what to say (12:12). Thus the Spirit is the guest of those who invite the Spirit, both for counsel and comfort.

¹⁷⁷ Green, *Luke*, 486-87. Green also notes the NRSV adds "life" in verse 25, even though that word is not in the Greek manuscripts.

Moltmann describes the hospitable relationship between the Holy Spirit and humans as much more than communication; it is reciprocal community.

In the experience of the Spirit, God is primal, all-embracing presence, not a detached counterpart. In the charismatic experience of the Spirit, we experience the reciprocal perichoresis of God and ourselves. That is a much more intimate communion than the community between Creator and creature. It is the communion of reciprocal indwelling. In the Holy Spirit the eternal God participates in our transitory life, and we participate in the eternal life of God. This reciprocal community is an immense outflowing of energy.¹⁷⁸

Thus reciprocal community with the Holy Spirit provides a proleptic experience of the eschatological hospitality of God.

This study has demonstrated God, in all three persons of the Trinity, to be a God of hospitality. Jesus actively served as guest and as host during his earthly ministry. He reframed the notion of hospitality to one that serves the purpose of inviting all people into a relationship with God. God, as a providential host, sustains and protects those within the boundaries of hospitality in the kingdom of God. That providence is suitable for hospitality in this imperfect world, but will empower perfect hospitality in the ultimate realization of the kingdom of God in the eschatological banquet. The Spirit is now the recipient of the hospitality of humans, dwelling in and amongst them so as to continue hospitable relationships between the human and divine. Since God is hospitable, does God expect the church to engage in hospitality? This work pursues that question next.

The People of God and Hospitality

Throughout his gospel, Luke is careful to connect the story of the community Jesus is forming both with the history of God's people in the Tanak and with the ongoing

¹⁷⁸ Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life*, 195-96.

activity of God in shaping a church that is still future tense.¹⁷⁹ As he relates the activities of Jesus, Luke describes a Jesus who is clearly concerned about the community that will survive his ministry, take up its ministry under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and move toward the divine eschaton. Jesus prepares his people for such a future by calling them to engage in practices that form them into a community, one in which he intends to reflect his image in function and character. He teaches them to pray (Luke 11:1-5), he calls them to a challenging use of their possessions (Luke 12:15-21; 12:32-34; 14:27-33; 18:22), and he models a radical hospitality (see above). As he sends them on their initial ministry experiences, Jesus builds the practice of hospitality into their work in a way that imitates the literal and symbolic form hospitality has taken within his own ministry.

The Hospitable Community of Jesus

A Hospitable Mission

In the gospel of Luke, Jesus sends pairs of traveling teachers into the countryside to announce the good news. Jesus first addresses the apostles with an abbreviated missionary commission (Luke 9:1-6). In the next chapter, Luke describes a second missionary excursion in the commissioning of the seventy-two by Jesus (Luke 10:1-12).¹⁸⁰ In these narratives Luke establishes literary patterns scholars have connected with both hospitality and household conversions. Arterbury notes that the key terms in these

¹⁷⁹ To heighten the connection, Luke presents his history in a mimesis of the styles of the priestly writer (P) and Deuteronomistic Historian (Dtr). Sterling, *Historiography and Self-Definition*, 352-63.

¹⁸⁰ The sending of the seventy-two is unique to the Lukan account. Matson deals with scholarly objections to this account as a creation of Luke, as asserted by Fitzmyer and others. For the purpose of this paper, we will use the number seventy-two (the more difficult reading); Matson, *Household Conversion Narratives*, 29-31. Seventy-two: Green, *Luke*, 412; Bock, *Luke*, vol. 2, 994. Seventy: Johnson, *Luke*, 166-67, 170. A draw: Fitzmyer, *Luke*, vol. 2, 845-46. Whether the number was seventy or seventy-two is not critical to the focus of this work.

pericopes are consistent with Hellenistic and biblical hospitality narratives and thus identifies them as hospitality narratives.¹⁸¹ Matson uses the same terms to define a literary form that he terms a household conversion narrative.¹⁸² This co-identification of a text as paradigmatic by those studying hospitality and evangelism suggests hospitality and evangelism are inseparably connected within the mission of the church as Luke understands it.

Matson asserts that Luke marks his household conversion pattern using the words enter (εἰσέρχομαι), house (οἰκία, οἶκος), peace (εἰρήνη), and staying (μένω). These terms are also recognizably markers of hospitality narratives, with the addition of a term Luke uses as a salvific marker: peace (εἰρήνη). Some household conversion narratives contain all four of these words: the commissioning of the Seventy-two (Luke 10:1-12) and the visit of Jesus to the house of Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1-10). Having established the form in these accounts, Luke uses it again in Acts (10:1-11:18; 16:11-15; 16:25-34; 18:1-11), where the narratives contain only some of the four words while still signifying the complete form. Since the commissions of Jesus Luke presents in his gospel are more prescriptive than descriptive, the text leaves the reader to imagine how the disciples experienced their enactment. Yet in the narrative of Jesus and Zacchaeus, Luke illustrates

¹⁸¹ Arterbury, *Entertaining Angels*, 139-43.

¹⁸² Matson, *Household Conversion Narratives*, 40-50. This form follows a general pattern: entering (εἰσέρχομαι) the community, entering (εἰσέρχομαι) the home (οἰκία, οἶκος), extending peace (εἰρήνη) to the host, and remaining (μένω) in that hospitality. Matson believes variations in the pattern may emphasize particular aspects of the form. The vocabulary marking these household conversion narratives is equivalent to that found in hospitality narratives, with the addition of the concept of peace (εἰρήνη), an addition Matson (along with others) considers to be a salvific term. Although Matson does not make note of it, one other term is found in the four household conversion narratives located in the book of Acts: baptism (βαπτίζω). See Acts 10:1-11:18; 16:11-15; 16:25-34; 18:1-11.

the shape such hospitality takes in the hands of Jesus. Later in Acts Luke will describe the church's enactment of this pattern.

In the normal progression of a hospitality narrative, the invitation to, and the acceptance or rejection of, hospitality begins the narrative; the sending out marks the end of the story. In this pericope Luke inverts the usual order, beginning from the time when Jesus sent (ἀπέστειλεν) his messengers on their mission toward hospitality and ending with the discussion of how they ought to enter the town and react to the community's hospitality or the lack thereof. The usual word for sending in a hospitality narrative would be προπέμπω, yet Luke's language choice here appropriately carries the connotation of sending a delegation, or ambassadors.¹⁸³ As one imagines the execution of the commission by the seventy-two, it is important to recognize that Jesus does not send individuals, but small communities. This choice emphasizes the relational nature of ministry in the kingdom of God; Jesus dispatches dyads of believers into the unknown without excess resources, yet he ensures they have at least one human relationship. Strengthened by this connection, the small missionary communities seek to establish other relationships so as to restore relationship between God and outsiders. Additionally, sending pairs instead of individuals provides a broader base of gifts for ministry, diverse experience for discernment, multiple perspectives for accountability, and mutual encouragement for the daily enactment of these directives. The smallness of these

¹⁸³ Green says, "Although Luke does not use the verb 'to send' as a technical term throughout his work, in this co-text [Lk 9 and 10] it clearly demarcates the twelve as Jesus' emissaries whose ministry is grounded in and an extension of his own." Green, *Luke*, 358. "To send" is not a technical term to Green, but is for Malherbe and Arterbury in the context of hospitality. Malherbe, *Social Aspects*, 96; Arterbury, *Entertaining Angels*, 54.

communities, though, makes them more like a delegation of ambassadors than the division of an army.

As Jesus describes the sending in more detail (Luke 10:3), he observes that he sends his people out “like lambs into the midst of wolves.” These words make explicit the vulnerable nature of the hospitality the disciples are about to experience. Although the words “carry no purse, no bag, no sandals,” imply physical vulnerability (Luke 10:4), they expand the range of vulnerability to the economic domain, and therefore to power as well. Jesus does not expect the disciples to depend simply upon the providence of God; he requires them to rely upon the hospitality of strangers, who serve as the conduit of God’s blessing.¹⁸⁴ Jesus then instructs his followers,

Whatever house you enter, first say, ‘Peace to this house!’ And if anyone is there who shares in peace, your peace will rest on that person; but if not, it will return to you. Remain in the same house, eating and drinking whatever they provide, for the laborer deserves to be paid. Do not move about from house to house.¹⁸⁵

These instructions for entering and staying at the house precede the instructions for entering the city (Luke 10:8-11), causing Matson to conclude this may “reflect its special interest in the house as a center of missionary activity, particularly as Matthew appears to preserve the more natural order.”¹⁸⁶

¹⁸⁴ Bock, *Luke*, vol. 2, 995. It is true, as Bock says, “they are to ask God for aid and to rely on his sovereign provision.” Yet to expect that such a blessing must come from an outsider to the community is a strong challenge to personal control and pride.

¹⁸⁵ Luke 10:5-7, NRSV.

¹⁸⁶ Matson, *Household Conversion Narratives*, 39. It seems more natural to talk about entering the city before entering the house, but Luke reverses the order.

The word “enter” (εἰσερχομαι) is consistently used to describe God’s messenger’s going into the house to talk with the household about salvation.¹⁸⁷ Robert Tannehill explains the implications of the entry of missionaries into households as the Lukan narrative moves into Acts:

Although Peter’s vision is applied to unclean people rather than unclean foods, the question of hospitality and shared meals plays a role in the text. Both the Gentiles’ entry into the house where Peter is staying and Peter’s entry into Cornelius’ house are noted (10:23, 27). If we recall the previous story about a gentile centurion who said, “I am not worthy that you enter under my roof” (Luke 7:6), these acts of entry appear to be significant.¹⁸⁸

For Tannehill entry into the house is significant because it marks the dramatic change in the practice of the people of God toward outsiders (specifically, Gentiles) brought by the church as the people of God.¹⁸⁹ For Matson entry is significant because it signals the arrival of salvation for a household. Yet the idea of hospitality among the people of God captures both of these realities. Hospitality changes the salvific status of this household while connecting it to a holy community and to the holy God of that community.

The word “house” (οἰκία, οἶκος) describes first the physical dwelling of the family, servants, and friends, and then the household living in that edifice.¹⁹⁰ The practice of hospitality among the people of God moves beyond the boundaries of physical structures and is found instead amongst human community, wherever that may be. Instead of inviting outsiders into a place the people of God have made safe for

¹⁸⁷ There are other Greek words used to describe entering, and Luke uses them in other places as we have seen, but in the household conversion narratives, he always uses εἰσερχομαι.

¹⁸⁸ Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts*, vol. 2, 136.

¹⁸⁹ Although Jewish people might have allowed Gentiles to share a meal in their home, it is highly unlikely that any Jewish person would have eaten in the home of a Gentile because of cleanliness regulations. After Acts 10, the practice of the church changes dramatically.

¹⁹⁰ Matson, *Household Conversion Narratives*, 40.

themselves, Jesus sends his people to vulnerably depend upon the security of a place others provide. In this reversal of hospitality, the measure of the safety of the place shared is the host's ability to speak and receive shalom. The word "peace" (εἰρήνη, שָׁלוֹם) is used to describe more than just an ordinary blessing or greeting, "it confronts the people of the house with God's salvation. In Lukan terms, 'peace' is a metaphor for salvation."¹⁹¹ As shalom, peace is a life-giving wholeness of persons and relationships.

Finally, the word "stay" (μένω) connotes the concepts of eating and drinking in table fellowship and living in the house as a guest. In some of the narratives, the concept of eating and drinking is indicative of the table fellowship that is a part of hospitality and substitutes for the word "stay."¹⁹² Instead of attempting to maintain their own holy and separate culture in a place where they have become the aliens, the messengers of God are to remain open to the culture of the people among whom they dwell, participating in and learning about the local culture without abandoning their unique identity. Over time these messengers will eat local foods prepared according to local customs, replace worn clothing with the local fashion, and learn local symbols, idioms, and narratives; thus they will have allowed their host culture to socialize them so as to empower them to work with the local community in the creation of a more useful local theology.¹⁹³ The longer these travelers inhabit this new community, the more they will also become aware of the political nature of the community and of the relative status of their host within that community. Yet Jesus forbids moving to the place of power or abundance; the team is to

¹⁹¹ Matson, *Household Conversion Narratives*, 45.

¹⁹² Matson, *Household Conversion Narratives*, 46-49. This is true for the household conversion narratives, and has also been noted above in other hospitality narratives.

¹⁹³ Robert J. Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theologies* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1985), 19-20.

remain with the family whose character has been proven to be hospitable by the offering of relationships and resources, however meager they may be.

A Radical Vision of the Hospitable Community

As paradigmatic as the Luke 10 narrative ought to be for the missional community, it is not the only such narrative for the people of God. Each of the Lukan narratives considered in this study thus far describes the hospitality of God through ways Jesus restores or reshapes the practice of hospitality for his disciples and coming church.¹⁹⁴ At the house of Simon Peter (Luke 4:38-44), Jesus connects healing, both spiritual and physical, with the hospitable community. As a guest of Simon the Pharisee (Luke 7:36-50), Jesus shows those present that achieving a community of peace, a place where safety and vulnerability are balanced between host and guest, supersedes all other rules of hospitality. As the host to over five thousand souls (Luke 9:10-17), Jesus calls his community of followers to keep the quest to become a holy and separate community in check with an openness to the needs of others for spiritual and physical bread. During his visit with Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1-10), Jesus shows that the hospitable community honors truth in relationships and yet hopes for the restoration of those who have become enemies of the people of God. Jesus surpasses a restoration of the hospitality envisioned in Torah and models for his people a form of hospitality that prescribes truly radical behavior.

The Primitive Church

Ultimately the crucifixion and resurrection embody what it means to be Jesus. The church seeks to become the body of Christ by becoming the suffering host or guest

¹⁹⁴ The parable of the Prodigal Son is not listed here, but is connected with community below in the section on children.

seeking hospitality among those who will accept or offer an invitation. They are a people who invite others into fellowship with God and with the community of God. Thus from the inception of the church, a radical hospitality open to the suffering of others has been an identifying virtue of Christian community.¹⁹⁵ This virtue is apparent even in the earliest narratives of the church. The summaries in Acts (2:41-47; 4:32-35; 5:12-16), for instance, describe more than numeric growth; they list the corporate virtues of the new community. Gregory Sterling emphasizes the important statements these brief passages make about the character of the Jerusalem church.¹⁹⁶ Its noteworthy character traits are virtues connected with hospitality: unity (4:32), fellowship (2:42, 46; 5:12), common use of possessions (2:44-45; 4:32, 34-35), prayer (2:42), and powerful teaching (2:42; 4:33). The character of the church is such that not only does God bless it with increase (2:47; 5:14), but also outsiders hold the community in respect (2:47; 5:13). Sterling asserts Luke deliberately uses philosophical terms of virtue, essentially describing Christians as “athletes of virtue,” that is, a community worthy of emulation by Jew and Greek.¹⁹⁷

Even the communally disruptive dispute about meals in Acts 6 may hold clues as to this church’s practice of hospitality. In the view of Reta Halteman Finger, it is possible the Grecian widows were not upset about the meals set before them, but rather, their ability to prepare and host such meals as a full part of this hospitable community.¹⁹⁸ Empowered hospitality is possible only when a community allows all members to be a

¹⁹⁵ Pohl most clearly makes this case. *Making Room*, 18-58.

¹⁹⁶ Gregory E. Sterling, “‘Athletes of Virtue’: An Analysis of the Summaries in Acts,” *JBL*, 113 (1994), 694.

¹⁹⁷ Sterling, “Athletes,” 696.

¹⁹⁸ Reta Halteman Finger, *Of Widows and Meals: Communal Meals in the Book of Acts* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 255-64. Whether Finger’s reading of Acts is correct, her claims connecting the community of production and empowered hospitality ring true.

part of the “community of production.” A community that does not allow its members or guests to reciprocate in hospitality holds them in a special class as recipients of benevolence, not hospitality, therefore marginalizing these individuals with the very resources holding the potential to affirm life and relationship. To avoid this, a community must more carefully discern when to be host and when to be guest.

The Discernment of the Hospitable Community

If the values, virtues, and practices of hospitality are to be brought into a community, the community ought to utilize a decision-making process that coheres with them. In order to hospitably engage in discernment, the community must address process, power, information, access, participation, voice, and action in ways that move toward just hospitality. Such hospitality would require a community to maintain the tension between the virtues of hospitality throughout the discernment process. A hospitable communal discernment process requires a community to empower members and guests to bring to the table diverse perspectives rooted in their experience, education, giftedness, and interests. To understand how such a discernment process is situated among the elements of practical theology, a discussion of the elements required to shape and maintain a ministering community of hospitality follows. I then describe the connection of the elements of practical theology with the Christian community’s normative texts in their various modalities. Finally, I will draw parallels between the interpretation of the biblical texts and the interpretation of situations, both of which are critical to a communal discernment process.

The Elements of Practical Theology

Theological concepts most powerfully shape a community when it incorporates them into its complete practical theology. A complete practical theology integrates four separate elements: perspective, praxis, process, and prophecy.¹⁹⁹ Theology provides perspective about God, God's activity, and God's kingdom for the church as it acts in this world. Praxis is the sum of the community's worship and ministry, and traditional elements of ministry are located within its purview. Process selects and informs theological perspective and ecclesial praxis. Prophecy challenges all of the other elements; it ensures that the resulting identity and action of the community will more correctly project the kingdom of God in submission to the ongoing activity of God at that time and in that place. As prophecy interacts with the other elements, so perspective, praxis, and process are interactive and inseparable. Perspective provides core content for praxis, delineates values for process, and gives language to prophecy. Process uses perspective to shape praxis and provides a hospitable forum for prophecy to question all three. Praxis puts flesh on theological perspective, locates ministry issues requiring a discernment process, and illuminates the gaps between praxis and what is ideal from the prophetic vantage point.

At the very least, hospitality is a powerful rubric for practical ministry by communities and ministries concerned with social justice issues. Hospitality integrates well into these four elements of practical theology. Hospitable perspective provides a view of a just world. Hospitable praxis moves toward an enactment of that world.

¹⁹⁹ This section relies heavily on previous work. Ron Bruner, "Practical Theology and Ministry at Westview Boys' Home and the Hollis Church of Christ" (D.Min. paper, Abilene Christian University, 2007).

Hospitable process empowers a community to justly discern such perspective and praxis. Hospitable receptivity to prophecy allows the community to discover and repair unjust and inadequate practical ministry. A community hoping to enact or strengthen its hospitality may start with any of the four elements. A hospitable process, though, develops habits while it discerns answers.

Process as an Element of Practical Ministry

As communities engage in praxis, they continually encounter new situations. Although epistemological humility is a virtue, the inability to establish absolute truth from the known data does not relieve the ministering community of its responsibility for reasonable exertions toward understanding its current reality.²⁰⁰ Day-to-day ministry situations require interpretation, assessment, and a response.²⁰¹ Like texts, situations require interpretation.²⁰² Such interpretation is complicated by varied perceptions and experiences of each human participant. Since, in Anton Boisen's view, human beings are "living human documents," human experience of any situation requires use of an appropriate hermeneutic.²⁰³ The hermeneutic of hospitality developed earlier in this work instantiates a hermeneutic suited both to situations and texts. Once practitioners have

²⁰⁰ Hans-Georg Gadamer responds to this difficulty: "Social life depends on our acceptance of everyday speech as trustworthy. We cannot order a taxi without this trust. Thus understanding is the average case, not misunderstanding. And Derrida, for example, when he takes a different view, really is speaking about literature. In literature there is a struggle to bring something to expression beyond what is already accepted." Dieter Misgeld and Graeme Nicholson, ed., *Hans-Georg Gadamer on Education, Poetry, and History: Applied Hermeneutics* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1992), 71.

²⁰¹ The subject of interpretation of situations receives more detailed attention below.

²⁰² Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory*, 11-12. "If all discourse is actualized as an event, all discourse is understood as meaning. By meaning or sense I here designate the propositional content, which I have just described, as the synthesis of two functions: the identification and the predication. It is not the event insofar as it is transient that we want to understand, but its meaning—the intertwining of noun and verb, to speak like Plato—insofar as it endures" (italics by Ricoeur).

²⁰³ Gerkin describes and expands upon Boisen's work, *The Living Human Document*, 37-39.

interpreted the situation, they must assess whether their normal praxis will cope with this event or whether some process of discernment is necessary to construct a proper response. Process allows the community to agree upon a way to evaluate and reshape its praxis when the community ceases to be content with its praxis or when a prophetic voice calls the community to task. In a process involving the hermeneutic of hospitality of this work, certain virtues are also values that allow the community to appraise its efforts and to gauge the significance of a prophetic response to potential or enacted efforts. Those using a discernment process should not unrealistically expect to obtain a true answer every time, but rather hope their practice will produce, as Aquino asserts, “a preponderance of true beliefs over false ones.”²⁰⁴

Each community must hammer out an agreed upon process that includes a theological framework on which to base the evaluation of its practice and a practical method to engage its theology.²⁰⁵ The process I propose provides both components. The theology of hospitality produced by this work constitutes the proposed theology for this process. A simple, tested, and rigorous method incorporated into the process of this study is James and Evelyn Whitehead’s tripolar model. It requires communal consideration of the mutually interdependent factors of tradition, experience, and culture in its decision-making process.²⁰⁶ In my use of this model, the voice of tradition is privileged when it speaks with a clear voice; questions unanswered by tradition or its principles seek

²⁰⁴ Aquino, *Communities of Informed Judgment*, 95.

²⁰⁵ A number of writers have explored process from a theological perspective. Luke Timothy Johnson proposes that a congregation communally discern its options based upon Scripture and experience. Johnson, *Scripture and Discernment*. Morris and Olsen propose a spiritual discernment process utilizing ten separate moves, some of which occasionally require multiple iterations. Morris and Olsen, *Discerning God’s Will Together*.

²⁰⁶ James D. and Evelyn E. Whitehead, *Method in Ministry*, 3-22.

answers from experience first (especially when informed by research or education) and culture second. Tradition subsumes Scripture and the larger faith community's historical interpretation of Scripture. The experiences of a community within its culture shape its tradition. Such experience is an amalgam of individual and communal experience. The community must also assess current cultural realities without abdicating its unique identity as the people of God.²⁰⁷

In all three parts of the model described above, the practitioner must compensate for the weaknesses of each of the factors by attending to the prophetic voice. That voice challenges the community's reading of text and tradition, tests the community's interpretation of its experience, and holds the community accountable for its adjustments to culture. If the prophetic perspective of the outsider required for a hospitable process is not present during the process, then a member of the community who can identify with and imaginatively enact the outsider's perspective must stand, as it were, at the margins of the community and respectfully challenge it.

The Whiteheads move their model (tradition, experience, and culture) through time with a method: attending, assertion, and pastoral response.²⁰⁸ At each phase of the method, the model is the tool used to shape discussion and response. Although the Whiteheads do not adequately address this, a proper interpretation of the situation is required to produce a clear definition of the issue in order for the discernment process to have any value. Frequently the interpretation of the situation or the definition of the issue

²⁰⁷ Douglas John Hall, *Thinking the Faith: Christian Theology in a North American Context* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991). Douglas John Hall's work provides an overview of post-Christendom cultural factors. This attention to culture ultimately requires the community to construct its own local theology. Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theologies*, 39-74.

²⁰⁸ Whitehead and Whitehead, *Method in Ministry*, 13-19.

must be done within communal discernment instead of prior to it. It is also important for the community to evaluate the results of its process; groups frequently assume their efforts have correctly responded to a situation without checking results afterwards. If the communally discerned solution proves inadequate, then the process should begin again with the additional insight provided by the failed response. The method as I have adapted it is shown in the figure below.²⁰⁹

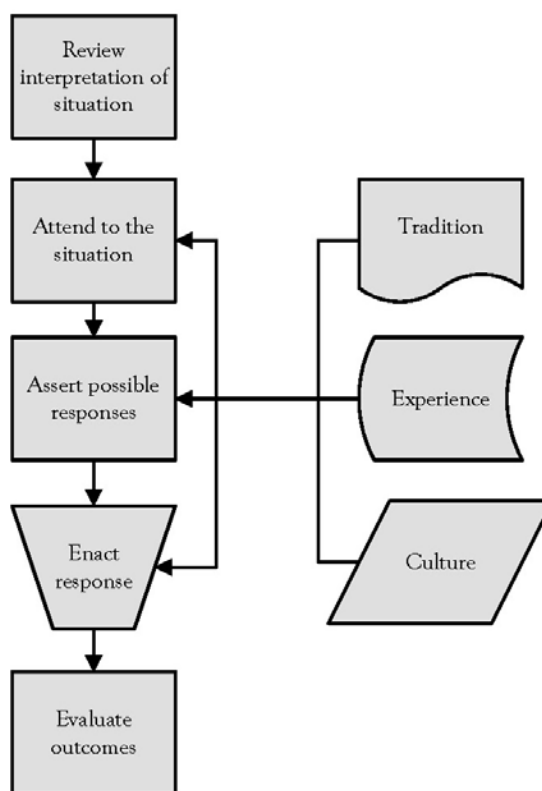


Figure 1. Communal discernment process.

The Elements of Practical Theology and the Modalities of Scripture

The four elements of practical theology (perspective, praxis, process, and prophecy) directly correspond with the four modalities of Scripture (narrative, liturgy,

²⁰⁹ The complete flowchart for this method is presented in appendix B, fig. 5.

wisdom, and prophecy) proposed by Mark Hamilton.²¹⁰ Perspective (theology) is an attempt to construct a coherent narrative about God, God's nature, actions, and interactions with the creation and people of God. Perspective guides the interpretation of situations, which are individual frames of a narrative, and provides clues as to the potential denouement of the story resulting from prospective responses in praxis. Praxis connects with liturgy. The purpose of the activity of God's people is to bring praise to God, whether literally engaging in worship, teaching the Bible, preparing lunch for a grieving family, or raising children to choose a Christian lifestyle. Process is the exercise of wisdom, a discernment of the connection between right thinking and acting, and thus is consistent with the purpose of wisdom literature (and its values and virtues). Prophecy most clearly connects with the prophetic mode as it challenges the narrative, the liturgy, and the wisdom of the community.²¹¹

Interpretation of Texts and Situations

No matter what the modality of Scripture, the written text requires the community to interpret that text so as to understand it. The beginning place for the interpretation of the biblical text is literally narrative. In narrative there is situation (comprised of action and dialogue), interpretation of the situation, and response. Significantly, interpretation is a part of the historical event; it is an element in the process of composing the text and is most obvious in hearing or reading the received text. The readers' interpretations work on

²¹⁰ Mark Hamilton, "Foundations in Ministry" (D.Min. class lectures, Abilene Christian University, Abilene, TX, 2007).

²¹¹ These connections do not have fixed boundaries. Ministerial elements tend toward certain modalities of Scripture, even though each element of ministry can access all modalities. It is possible that, in differing ministries or with differing ministers, these alignments might vary.

an interpretation of an interpreted situation.²¹² It is also important to note the potential for inspiration exists at the level of the event, the text, and the reading. Inspiration at the level of the event is perhaps most clear in the behavior of the prophets. Although such readings are not canonical and carry limited authority, it seems that certain interpretations of those texts carry the marks of inspiration as well. If Christians are truly Spirit-filled, then inspiration seems more probable than possible.²¹³

The interpretation of situations is parallel to the practice of interpreting Scripture. Both give the interpreter information about theology and anthropology. Both text and situation involve narratives with a point of view and engage characters in action and dialogue. Readers interpret texts, but their writers have already interpreted the events in the text during the task of composition. The assumption implicit in identifying a text as inspired is that such compositional interpretations are God breathed. Questions may be asked of the text to enhance understanding, but the certainty of the answer is often limited by the finiteness of the text or frustrated by its deliberate ambiguity. The advantage in interpreting situations is the opportunity to query actors about unknown parts of the narrative and about their motivations or point of view within that narrative.²¹⁴ These queries do not guarantee characters will give correct or useful answers; actors can be ambiguous, confused, deceptive, or they can reshape their responses as a result of the

²¹² Another perspective on the process of event, writing, and interpretation is that of Ricoeur, which he explains in considerable, rigorous detail in *Interpretation Theory*. Ricoeur's view is more complex, differentiating the interpretive task depending upon whether the word is spoken, written, heard, or read.

²¹³ Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life*, 6. Moltmann says, "I cannot see that there is any fundamental alternative between God's revelation to human beings and human experience of God. How is a man or woman supposed to be able to talk about God if God does not reveal himself? How are men and women supposed to be able to talk about a God of whom there is no human experience?"

²¹⁴ Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory*, 25-44.

inquiry itself. Speakers and hearers may find themselves limited by the boundaries of language. Perhaps especially in the moment, participants struggle to interpret the situation as it unfolds. Such inquiries with participants do, though, increase the potential for understanding. Access to different actors can either simplify or complicate the interpretive task while enriching the interpreting community's choices.

The interpretation of situations, whether in text or experience, most critically involves language. How does our perspective shape our interpretation?²¹⁵ What are the nuances of the semantic choices? What are the potential encoding and decoding errors in this speech event? How were those words delivered? Do the means or timing of delivery communicate as much or more than content? What do these actions or gestures signify? It is essential for the community to determine how God might be acting in this situation. Is God's presence or action indicated by providence, inspiration, opportunity, otherwise inexplicable success, or perhaps even baffling failure?

Underneath the attempts to interpret action and language is the native human habit of attempting to ascertain intent. This is the interpretive act best exercised with the greatest care and generosity, or else not at all. Human beings are complexly motivated and are frequently unaware of all of their motives. Some children are comfortable enough with their environment to be transparent about their motivation, while others, most

²¹⁵ Hans-Georg Gadamer elucidates the connection between living in a situation and interpreting it, while at the same time having no claim to an unbiased perspective: "Language, then is not the finally found anonymous subject of all social-historical processes and action, which presents the whole of it activities as objectifications to our observing gaze; rather, it is by itself the game of interpretation that we all are engaged in every day. In this game nobody is above and before all the others; everybody is at the center, is 'it' in the game. Thus is it always his turn to be interpreting. This process of interpretation takes place whenever we 'understand,' especially when we see through prejudices or tear away the pretenses that hide reality. There, indeed, understanding comes into its own. This idea recalls what we said about the *atopon*, the strange, for in it we have 'seen through' something that appeared odd and unintelligible: we have brought it into our linguistic world." Thus Gadamer's act of interpretation becomes akin to hospitality. Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, trans. David E. Linge (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), 32.

notably those at-risk, conceal their motives by silencing both their voice and affect.²¹⁶ Only God knows the human heart. Interpretation of motivation from action is notoriously fraught with difficulty and error.²¹⁷ Even with well-intentioned individuals and communities, self-revelation of motive is often incomplete, incorrect (whether by deceit or self-deceit), and/or rhetorical.²¹⁸ Though patently inhospitable, people and groups tend to distort motivations in an attempt to project or avoid certain images. They may view such images as a functional requirement of their attempts to persuade or negotiate with another. Interpreting a situation and knowing a person within that situation implies knowing at least part of the larger story. When a person behaves inexplicably, the natural tendency is to question the behavior as irrational or unethical. This may happen when the known story plus the inexplicable behavior form a narrative whose trajectory points towards an unbelievable ending. Often, neither the assumed narrative nor the evaluation is true. When one knows another whose actions become inexplicable, it is evidence of a missing narrative that must be accessed to correctly understand the situation.

²¹⁶ I use affect here, as is the common practice in psychology, to denote an expressed emotional state or condition. This concealment of affect may or may not be deliberate. Since interpreters tend to read the affect of others so as to gain clues to their motivation, they can completely misread children who have certain conditions, Asperger's syndrome, for example. For an insider's perspective of this problem, see John Elder Robison, *Look Me in the Eye: My Life with Asperger's*, rev. ed. (New York: Three Rivers, 2008).

²¹⁷ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, 30. Gadamer notes interpreters can even create meaning where none exists: "[D]oes hermeneutics really take its bearings from a limiting concept of perfect interaction between understood motives and consciously performed action (a concept that is itself, I believe, fictitious)? I maintain that the hermeneutical problem is universal and basic for all interhuman experience, both of history and of the present moment, precisely because meaning can be experienced even where it is not actually intended."

²¹⁸ Thus discerning the intent of actors in situations is parallel to the notorious difficulty of determining authorial intent.

As words used in situations and texts may be polysemous, so situations and biblical text may also be multivalent.²¹⁹ As interpreters of situations analyze language, action, context, and the larger narrative, it is essential for them to remember their recollections of these events are still only perceptions and interpretations, and hospitality to the perceptions and interpretations of others holds the best chance for a community to reach consensus as a result of communal discernment. Both shape the reality of humans, regardless of how well perceptions and interpretation connect with reality. The truth, however painful, inconvenient, or inaccessible, is the only thing that sets the community free to think or act rightly, powerfully, and hopefully.

A Community of Covenant

When two or more people are in the same place, several difficulties soon emerge. The first problem communities have is the tendency for individuals to experience their situations differently: interpreting them and evaluating the causes for them in dissimilar ways (see above). Whether circumstances are good or bad, the need for the community to act in the situation soon produces the second difficulty: diverse opinions about appropriate responses. Groups tend to extremes in trying times; they either deny any real disagreement, or they make inappropriate decisions too quickly. Both denial and inappropriate decisiveness squash the strengths empowered by diversity: creativity and innovation.²²⁰ Communal discernment counteracts these tendencies. Yet even in such

²¹⁹ This is particularly true when speakers or writers use symbols or metaphors to describe an event. Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory*, 45-69.

²²⁰ Rendle, *Behavioral Covenants*, xiii. “[C]reative and innovative solutions are seldom discovered by people who are all alike and are all in agreement about the way things should be done. Creative and innovative solutions or steps are seldom discovered without some uncomfortable rambling about unusual or unorthodox ideas.”

communities, the third difficulty emerges: political systems arise or reorganize. Because humans too often resort to the behavior of their culture instead of the practices of their faith,²²¹ political power is often abused in order to act promptly, to limit dialogue, or to minimize the negative consequences of any action for those with the greatest power.²²²

Covenants can cope with such human tendencies instead of denying their existence or power. Instead of limiting the community, Lisa Hess asserts, covenant empowers it.

Covenant disrupts human life “as usual” and gives it deeper roots for discipleship than previously imaginable. It creates space in which intimate relationship grows, breathes, expands beyond the imagination of all parties. . . . Covenant enlivens the manner in which we perceive our worlds. It brings coherence into paradoxical or logically contradictory situations previously opaque to traditional theological understanding. It bears fruits of the Spirit, identifiable within scriptural witness. It also challenges previous scriptural understanding and places our story immediately, relationally, with those of present persons instead of past stories.²²³

Interestingly, Hess frames her description of covenant community in such a way as to evoke images of the hospitable community.

Rendle insists covenantal communities are real communities “created by working through disagreements, not by going around them and not by denying that they are real.”²²⁴ A behavioral covenant can define the practices and principles that empower a ministry to work through difficulties and seize opportunities. Yet a covenant can do more

²²¹ Rendle, *Behavioral Covenants*, 19. Rendle observes that “Congregations seem to have defaulted to the standards and the behaviors of the culture rather than claimed and followed the standards and behaviors of their own faith.”

²²² Rendle, *Behavioral Covenants*, 36-37. Rendle notes the challenge for leaders to remain with people “in the wilderness” for very long, because the desire to move on is strong despite the multiplicity of viable options.

²²³ Lisa Hess, *Artisanal Theology: Intentional Formation in Radically Covenantal Community* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2009), 22.

²²⁴ Rendle, *Behavioral Covenants*, xvii.

than that; it can also define mutually accepted principles for the practice of ministry in a given context. For a covenant to function in such a way, it is essential the community invite God to participate in said covenant.²²⁵ The presence of God provides resources to maintain the covenant and a relationship that holds participants accountable to the covenant.

God's participation in covenant signals its difference from contract. Volf asserts that contracts (1) are performance oriented, (2) are reciprocal, and (3) involve limited commitment.²²⁶ He contrasts them with covenants, which require participants to (1) make space for the other and the behavior of the other, (2) be self-giving to the extent that a covenant is not broken even if one party violates it, and (3) keep them unconditionally, or eternally.²²⁷ The first two of Volf's covenantal prescriptions reveal the concept of covenants' coherence with a hospitable community.

Such covenants do not necessarily regulate all domains of human interactions. Rendle lists three domains in which human beings relate to one another: (1) the "domain of law," (2) the domain of "free choice," and (3) the domain of "manners and obedience to the unenforceable."²²⁸ Every community exists within a state that regulates certain behaviors by law; obedience to such laws is not enforced by the community but the state. It seems intuitively obvious that the domain of free will ought to be exactly that; members of a community have certain discretionary powers to act free of law or

²²⁵ Hess, *Artisanal Theology*, 21. Hess defines covenant as, "a primarily relational word that funds relationship with God and others through commitment, not self-will or autonomy."

²²⁶ Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 148.

²²⁷ Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 154-55.

²²⁸ Rendle, *Behavioral Covenants*, 31-36. Rendle appropriates these domains from the philosophical work of Lord John Fletcher Moulton.

communal covenant. Rendle asserts that it is in the domain of manners and obedience to the unenforceable that behavioral covenants have their particular power. Since ministry is so complex that it is neither desirable nor practicable to construct hard and fast rules to regulate it, an agreed-upon set of theological principles and practices as defined in a covenant has the potential to serve as a useful guide within that domain to both the community and the individuals who comprise it.²²⁹ Such covenant coheres with the concept of the hospitable community as the people build covenant upon consensus and enact it by individual choices to become or remain a part of such a community.²³⁰

Hospitable Discernment in Day-to-day Practice

Covenants empower communally consistent decisions in a changing world and, in the practice of day-to-day ministry, stand in the gap between fixed policies and communal discernment. Although communal discernment is powerful and flexible, it requires a lengthy and complex process. Such process is too costly in time and resources to use for any but the most critical decisions: those that touch the lives of many, establish precedent, or shape communal identity. On the other end of the continuum, though explicit policy and procedure manuals are pragmatically necessary, they are equally problematic to construct and largely inflexible in the face of changing circumstance. Concerted use of policy, covenant, and communal discernment allow flexibility in daily

²²⁹ Hess, *Artisanal Theology*, 22. Hess avers, “Covenant . . . is an irresistible claim and an intentional commitment lived particularly into a life of faith and spiritual practice, known within a larger community story. This claim and commitment do not originate in personal choice, but participants have free choice within it.”

²³⁰ If Rendle’s approach to behavioral covenants is used, then even the practice of producing such a covenant coheres with hospitality. That methodology requires leadership to enact three principles: “getting up on the balcony,” that is to get perspective, “providing a safe environment,” and “valuing/managing conflict,” which is a form of openness. Rendle, *Behavioral Covenants*, 40-48. At least the last two of these three principles cohere with the hermeneutic of hospitality that this work describes.

practice while maintaining the identity of the community and consistency of ministry with those the community serves. Such a process design is presented below in figure 2. Flexibility, identity, and consistency are important for all communities, but particularly those interacting with children. To a consideration of such virtues, especially those virtues empowering hospitable practices with children, we now turn.

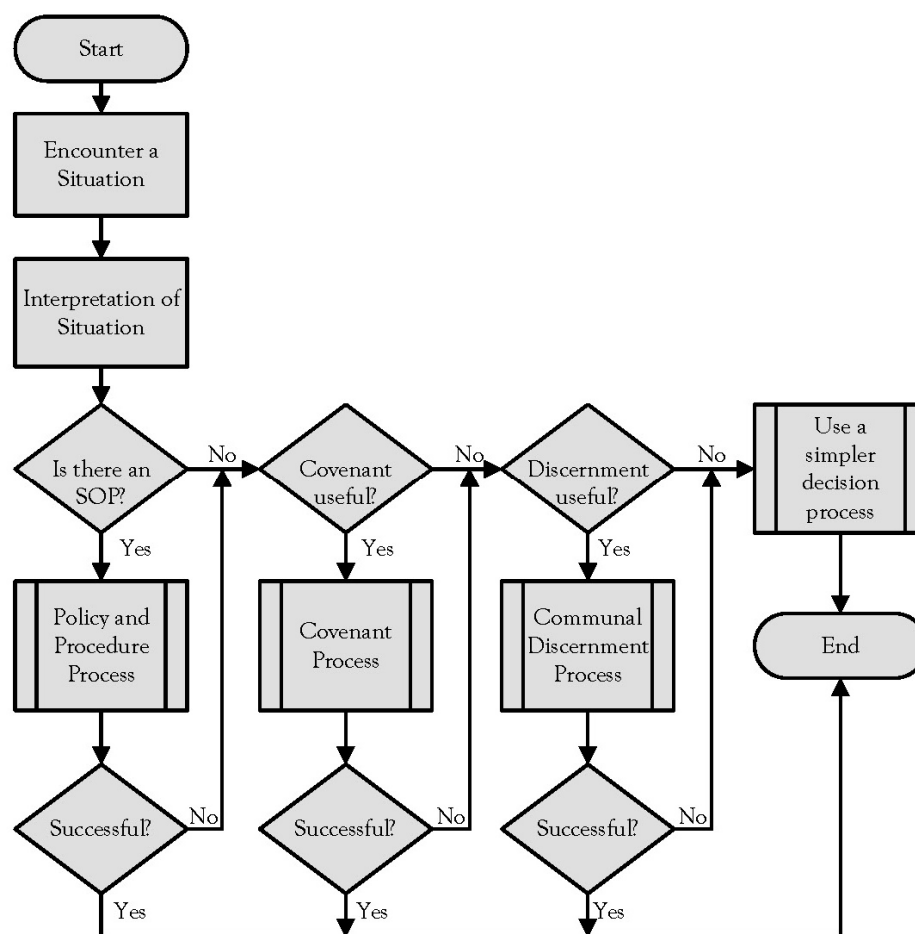


Figure 2. Flowchart of the interrelation of the various decision-making processes.²³¹

²³¹ Each of the process blocks in this diagram is depicted in a detailed flowchart in appendix B of this thesis. For an illustration of the use of policy and procedures, see appendix B, fig. 3. Such policies and procedures are best constructed with a communal discernment process. The flowchart of the covenant process in appendix B, fig. 4, demonstrates how a community would use the covenant and the hermeneutic of hospitality produced by this thesis. Fig. 5 in the appendix shows the complete process of communal discernment described partially in fig. 1 (above).

Hospitality and Children

The people of God are the community of hospitality, seeking to extend the offer of relationship with God and God's people to those whose relationship with God has become broken. Yet as we soon shall see, all children have a relationship with God, whether or not their families make them aware of it. What then is the church's function in regards to hospitality toward the child? Walter Brueggemann suggests the biblical texts define two roles for the church when it comes to children. First, the church must provide nurture and socialization for its own children. Second, it must show "attentiveness to *other children* who are a special concern of the tradition."²³² Brueggemann thus calls the church to care for its own children and remain open to the needs for nurture and socialization, resources and relationships of children not within the church. This is particularly true for those who are outcasts or orphans. The people of God are called to bring all children into an awareness of their existing relationship with God. The following discussion reveals that the people of God accomplish these tasks best when their practices take the shape of hospitality.

Children and Hospitality in Christian Tradition

Two narratives in the gospel of Luke elucidate the primacy of children in the words of Jesus and in his description of the kingdom of God; these texts also provide clues as to the appropriate practice of ministry with children. The first, Luke's narrative answering the question "Who is the greatest?" (Luke 9:46-48) reveals welcoming

²³² Walter Brueggemann, "Vulnerable Children, Divine Passion, and Human Obligation," in *The Child in the Bible*, ed. Marcia J. Bunge, Terence E. Fretheim, and Beverly Roberts Gaventa (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 419. Emphasis by Brueggemann.

children to be the true sign of greatness in the kingdom. I will show how Jesus' view of welcoming children requires showing them hospitality. The second narrative, in which Jesus blesses the children (Luke 18:15-17), identifies the relationship of children to God according to God in the flesh. Both pericopes give evidence supporting Luke's concern for the marginalized and children as a particular class of the outsider.

Welcoming Children

Luke's account of the dispute over greatness differs from narratives in the other Synoptic Gospels (Luke 9:46-48). Luke reveals Jesus was aware of the disciples' inner thoughts, discerning the argument about greatness among them without having heard it. To concretize his lesson, Jesus brings a child into their circle. As Judith Gundry-Volf has noted, inhabitants of the Hellenistic world viewed children as having potential, yet typically found them to be "fundamentally deficient and not yet human in the full sense. They were physically small, underdeveloped, and vulnerable."²³³ Consequently, children held low status. Even though Jewish cultures viewed children more benevolently, parents typically viewed young people as requiring careful supervision and discipline.²³⁴

Not merely placing the child among the disciples, Jesus receives (ἐπιλαμβάνεως) and stands the child by *his* side.²³⁵ The child thus enters and finds welcome in the personal space Jesus opens to receive the youth. Jesus habitually created a safe place near

²³³ Judith Gundry-Volf, "The Least and the Greatest," in *The Child in Christian Thought*, ed. Marcia J. Bunge (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 32.

²³⁴ Gundry-Volf, "The Least and the Greatest," 34-36.

²³⁵ The probability that Luke is deliberately using a compound of λαμβάνειν (to receive) to signify a hospitable welcome is increased by the presence of other hospitality language within this pericope.

his person whenever he enacted hospitality from place to place.²³⁶ Jesus then makes a pronouncement: “Whoever welcomes [δέξεται] this child in my name welcomes [δέχεται] me, and whoever welcomes [δέξεται] me welcomes [δέχεται] the one who sent me” (Luke 9:48b). Four times in one sentence Jesus uses various forms of the hospitality marker δέχομαι (welcome).²³⁷ Luke essentially constructs an enthymeme with the words of Jesus, lacking only the conclusion of the syllogism:

Major premise: Whoever welcomes a child in the name of Jesus welcomes Jesus.

Minor premise: Whoever welcomes Jesus, welcomes God.

Conclusion: One who welcomes a child in the name of Jesus welcomes God.

Beyond emphasizing hospitality as the appropriate practice of the people of God toward children, Luke seems to imply that Jesus calls his people to a hospitality motivated by *ius hospitii*, *ius dei* (the right of hospitality is the right of God).²³⁸ This is a high and virtuous motivation in the Greco-Roman culture. At the same time, in the agonistic cultural context of Luke and Jesus, to give welcome to a person of no significance brings the possibility of losing honor or acquiring shame for the host instead of gaining honor.²³⁹ Welcoming a great person would, in the eyes of the disciples, make them great. Yet Jesus intentionally inverts societal norms.²⁴⁰ Persons who are low enough in social status (or sufficiently unconcerned with status) to welcome a child will find honor in God’s

²³⁶ As I noted previously in the discussion of the meal at the house of Simon the Pharisee (pp. 59-62), and in the feeding of the five thousand (pp. 62-66), Jesus did not let his poverty of owned resources or place (whether of a house or table) impede his hospitality.

²³⁷ The discussion of technical terms for hospitality (above, pp. 24-26) clearly marks this verb as one used to describe a hospitable welcome.

²³⁸ This motivation was discussed previously on pp. 26-29 of this work.

²³⁹ Malina and Neyrey, “Honor and Shame in Luke-Acts,” 28-29.

²⁴⁰ John T. Carroll, “What Then Will This Child Become,” in *The Child in the Bible*, ed. Terence E. Fretheim and Beverly Roberts Gaventa (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 188-89.

presence at their table. This is true for welcoming a child and for welcoming the person with the equivalent social status of a child. Jesus simultaneously changes the rules of hospitality, changes the status of children relative to the people of God, and identifies hospitality as the means by which the church extends itself to the child. Jesus also provides a motive for this hospitality: the welcome they would show to God, they should show to children. Thus if one seeks to imitate the example of Abraham as host (Gen 18), then one must welcome children.²⁴¹

The hospitality hermeneutic reveals the focus of this brief narrative on the tension between safety and vulnerability, and more precisely, on power and kenosis. Whether the disciples desire to have power and status to maintain feelings of safety and control or whether their purposes are more benevolent, they are grasping for power.²⁴² Gatekeepers, self-appointed or otherwise, exercise power. Thus the disciples have yet to learn the virtue of vulnerability, and the child embodies the ideal object lesson for Jesus to employ to teach them an appropriate balance between safety and vulnerability. It may also be that the disciples had “holiness” concerns about these noisy little distractions entering the “holy ground” in the presence of the great teacher, thereby compromising Jesus, the disciples, and their community. Jesus mandates for his people a posture of openness to children.

In light of the prevalence of the patron-client dichotomy in the first-century world, it would be tenable to interpret the activity and speech of Jesus as offering to

²⁴¹ The idea of Abraham as exemplar for the Jewish people is found on p. 30 of this work. The admonition of Jesus actually corrects the behavior of Abraham as found in Gen 21.

²⁴² To Coakley this is a warning sign for an abuse of power. Coakley, *Powers and Submissions*, 11, 34.

assume the role of patron to a world of client children.²⁴³ One could understand the “welcome” required by Jesus as the type of welcome extended by a patron to a client coming for protection, shelter, or food. One might also postulate that Jesus wanted his disciples to assume such a role. Then again, the disciples may have perceived that they were acquiring the status of brokers, thus controlling access to Jesus. Such an assumption would be consistent with their maneuvers for the position of the “greatest.”²⁴⁴ Green rightly dismisses all of these:

Overall, however, Luke’s accounts are less focused on individual patron-client relations and less friendly toward the institution of patronage. . . . Of special interest, then is Jesus’ instruction to give without expectation of return—a message applicable to patronal relations and to systems of balanced reciprocity—in 6:34-35, together with his portrayal of God as the Supreme Benefactor who gives freely (6:35b-36). In these contexts it is imperative to remember that Jesus thus makes an economic statement grounded ultimately in his vision of a transformed system of social relations. People who follow Jesus are to give to each other as they would to those of their immediate kinship group. Distinctions based on social status as defined in the larger world are thus overturned as Jesus challenges people to accept the previously unacceptable as though they were family.²⁴⁵

Thus instead of assuming the position of patron in a patron-client relationship with the little ones, the overall perspective of Luke is for the disciples to treat each other as family, regardless of age, gender, race, or status (economic or otherwise). When Jesus issues the challenge to “welcome this child in my name,” it becomes obvious that Jesus intends Christians to treat one another as if they are the least in the kingdom dealing with the greatest in the kingdom, not from the superior position of a patron. This thoroughly

²⁴³ Halvor Moxnes, “Patron-Client Relations and the New Community in Luke-Acts,” in *The Social World of Luke-Acts: Models for Interpretation*, ed. Jerome H. Neyrey (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1991), 244-61. Everett Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 55-56.

²⁴⁴ Moxnes, “Patron-Client Relations,” 260-61.

²⁴⁵ Green, *Theology of Luke*, 15-16.

removes the foundation for the patron-client interpretation. David Moessner gives a reading of this pericope addressing this issue:

Unless a person can humble one's puffed-up "heart," and "in my name" associate with, that is, receive (δέχομαι) a person as small (μικρότερον) and insignificant as a child, that one will be *unable* to "receive" Jesus and thus also the One who has sent Jesus (v. 48). There is no point in being at Jesus' side unless one is humble enough to be at a "child's" side. The rebuke to the disciples could hardly be more scathing. They are failing to obey Jesus' voice through "proud and patronizing hearts."²⁴⁶

To Luke, the small (μικρότερον) were the oppressed, the marginalized, whom the Messiah had come to rescue. Children were primary members of this group, but Luke included others as well, including many who had been cast off, some since birth: the lame, the blind, the leprous, the poor, the sinners, and, in this patriarchal society, the women.²⁴⁷

Blessing the Children

Luke's rendering of the blessing of the children in Luke 18:15-17 is similar to the other synoptics except its placement in the overall structure of his gospel and in the use of βρέφη to describe the children being brought to Jesus as infants.²⁴⁸ Because of the importance of hospitality in the Lukan narrative, Green finds "'Receiving little children'

²⁴⁶ David P. Moessner, *Lord of the Banquet: The Literary and Theological Significance of the Lukan Travel Narrative* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1989), 65.

²⁴⁷ Green, *Theology of Luke*, 89-91.

²⁴⁸ Bock agrees with Fitzmyer's criticism of this word, saying that "the term is inaccurate because a child with a capacity for consciousness needs to be present for Jesus' remark in Luke 18:17 to work." Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 1193. Bock, *Luke*, vol. 2, 1469. This criticism presumes some action of the child is necessary, as opposed to the child's status or quality being the issue. Marshall concurs. I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, NIGC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 682-83. Bock goes on to claim that "the point of comparison is a child's dependent trust. . . . Without such dependent faith, one cannot enter the kingdom." Bock, *Luke*, vol. 2, 1471. Bock fails to see that people were bringing these children to Jesus. Perhaps they walked them into the presence of Jesus, but considering Luke's use of βρέφη, it is more probable that some were carried. This would not exemplify "dependent faith" at all. Jesus accepts children because of who they are, not what they have done or believed. Johnson agrees. *Luke*, 280.

is tantamount to granting them hospitality, performing for them actions (washing of feet, kiss of greeting, and anointing the head—7:44-46) normally reserved for those of equal or higher status.”²⁴⁹ Once again Jesus has inverted the values of his society so as to extend hospitality to those who most need it. He does this without any illusions that the behavior of children is always innocent (Luke 7:32).

Both Green and Fitzmyer describe the touch of Jesus in terms of a blessing.²⁵⁰ There is more at stake here than children seeing Jesus or even in their having Jesus touch them. In discussing the parallels (Matt 19:13-15; Mark 10:13-16), Andries G. Von Aarde makes a case for the concept of blessing and exposing a child as being terms that are “semantically complementary” in Mediterranean cultures.²⁵¹ The first term, τίθημι, literally means “putting” (τιθεὶς τὰς χεῖρας ἐπ’ αὐτά, literally, “putting his hands on them”) but is translated as blessing in the Markan parallel of this passage. The second term, ἐκτίθημι, connotes “putting out,” and specifically, “putting out of the house” in the case of exposure. A child was not considered to be a part of the family until the father had accepted the child as his own. Thus after birth, a child faced either τίθημι or ἐκτίθημι, blessing or putting out. Children born of an illicit relationship, with a physical deformity, or of the undesired (usually female) gender were shown inhospitality; they were “put out of the house.”²⁵² Otherwise perfect but unwanted children were sometimes exposed in

²⁴⁹ Green, *Luke*, 651. See also Green, *Theology of Luke*, 118.

²⁵⁰ Fitzmyer, *Luke*, vol. 2, 1193-94; Green, *Luke*, 650.

²⁵¹ Andries G. Van Aarde, “The Evangelium Infantium, the Abandonment of Children, and the Infancy Narrative in Matthew 1 and 2 from a Social Science Perspective,” *SBL 1992 Seminar Papers*, Ed Lovering, ed. (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1992), 441-45. Van Aarde asserts that these terms are the semantic equivalent of “hot” and “cold.”

²⁵² Green, *Theology of Luke*, 118.

ancient Mediterranean cultures.²⁵³ Only children who received the blessing were members of the family. By showing hospitality to these children and by blessing them, Jesus accepts them, whether acknowledged by their physical parents or not, as a part of the family of God. His actions acknowledge a reality that has been true since their birth (or perhaps their conception, Ps 139:13).

In a Hebrew family, acceptance was expressed with a blessing. When Israel was finally confronted with the sons of Joseph (Gen 48:8-20), he blessed them and asked God to perpetuate his name through them. Thus Israel blessed them not merely as his grandchildren, but he blessed them as if they were his own children. In a similar way, God, in the person of Jesus, blessed children whose relationship to Godself was not that of grandchildren, but children. That appears to be the reason Jesus wanted his disciples to allow all of the children to come to him; such children all belonged to his Parent already and he wanted to make certain they knew they had a place in the family of God.

Children among the Hospitable Community

Rodney Clapp finds even infants “come to us as aliens and have to learn to live in our world.”²⁵⁴ The act of bringing a child into a family is inherently an act of hospitality, whether by birth or adoption. Adopting a child is a series of persistent choices toward offering community and resources to a child who is literally a stranger. As an adoptive mother, Jeanne Stevenson-Moessner reports, “homecoming for an adopted child is the placement or the entrance of a child into the life of a family or an individual. Usually

²⁵³ Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity*, 73-74.

²⁵⁴ Rodney Clapp, *Families at the Crossroads: Beyond Traditional and Modern Options* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1993), 144.

there is jubilation, gaiety, celebration amidst ceremony, gifts, parties, and influx of relatives and friends, a reception at the airport. . . . The one constant is the hospitable heart.”²⁵⁵ Stevenson-Moessner thus describes the arrival of an adopted child in the home in the language of hospitality.

For a woman who bears a child, this receiving of a stranger is intimately physical. When childbearing is what it ought to be, a woman chooses to receive that which is strange to her so that she can conceive, and as host, she provides place, time, nurture, and protection that are life-giving to her guest. As much as this hospitality provides blessing to both, it is ultimately a sharing of vulnerability and suffering that tests safety for both host and guest. This intimate hospitality concludes with a sending forth into the world along the next phase of the journey, with the extension of protection by the host to the guest, protection that emulates first-century Mediterranean hospitality at its best.

Whether a child enters a family by birth or adoption, that child has an immediate and ongoing need for the same resources and relationships that are at the heart of hospitality. Among the most immediate concerns for parents experiencing the arrival of a new little stranger is the urgency of hospitably understanding and providing for the needs of their child. T. Berry Brazelton posits seven “irreducible needs” of children: ongoing nurturing relationships; physical protection, safety, and regulation; experiences tailored to individual differences; developmentally appropriate experiences; limit setting, structure, and expectations; stable supportive communities with cultural continuity; and a protected

²⁵⁵ Jeanne Stevenson-Moessner, *The Spirit of Adoption: At Home in God’s Family* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2003), 57.

future.²⁵⁶ Brazelton's irreducible needs include language that echoes the language of hospitality: relationships, safety, openness, holiness, and hope. All of these needs are essential in his view, yet there is one need that serves as the gateway to all of the others: ongoing nurturing relationships. The lack of an enduring connection to one or more parents, to a family, and to a community severely compromises the ability of a child to find fulfillment of the other six needs.

Unfortunately, such poverty is altogether too common. In her practical theology of childhood and poverty, Pamela Couture establishes that "Children's poverty is conditioned by two overlapping categories of poverty—material poverty and the poverty of tenuous connections."²⁵⁷ Or to use the language of this thesis, children require resources and relationships. Couture also understands that relationships function as the conduit through which resources are delivered.²⁵⁸ In Couture's view, when either resources or relationships fail, the community of God is responsible to step in and "influence society and culture."²⁵⁹ Children without help quickly become outcasts.

Children, as with all human beings, flourish best with a balance of relationships (family, friends, faith family, and community) and resources (place, time, food, drink, experiences, and knowledge). Parents, though, often struggle to provide either

²⁵⁶ T. Berry Brazelton and Stanley I. Greenspan, *The Irreducible Needs of Children: What Every Child Must Have to Grow, Learn, and Flourish* (Cambridge, MA: Perseus, 2000).

²⁵⁷ Pamela D. Couture, *Seeing Children, Seeing God: A Practical Theology of Children and Poverty* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2000), 14.

²⁵⁸ Couture, *Seeing Children, Seeing God*. This is a key thesis for Couture. For example, "Children's poverty must be overcome by building relationships with vulnerable children. This work of care is a means of finding God" (14). "The poorest children in our society are those with only tenuous connections to their families and communities" (30-31). "Surrogate families that are provided through fostering, adoption, and institutional care are essential if children are to have a future" (31).

²⁵⁹ Couture, *Seeing Children, Seeing God*, 15.

relationships or resources in balance. Some parents, seeking personal fulfillment and career success, provide an overabundance of economic resources, but fail to provide a consistent place for their children to build enduring relationships as they move their families from one new community to another. Other parents may not be as mobile, but because of their career-oriented priorities, they may substitute resources for time or relationship with their offspring. Consequently, children not only remain strangers to their parents, they actually become strangers in need within a culture of consumption.²⁶⁰ Thus environmental influences often exacerbate the strangeness of children in the perception of their parents.

Hospitality to Troubled Children

The unfortunate reality is that the lives of children are not all playful, placid, peaceful, or perfect. There are innumerable ways that children encounter trouble, oppression, and rejection in their lives. Some of those issues include surviving as at-risk youth, experiencing trauma, getting into trouble at school, engaging in substance abuse, struggling with emerging sexuality, encountering legal problems, and being orphaned. These issues are too large and complex for most families to handle alone. Consequently, the families of these children seek help from their community or from local ministries. As such communities approach each of these issues in the lives of children, the practice of hospitality holds promise as an efficacious therapeutic response. Although hospitality is

²⁶⁰ For a description of this problem and a Christian response, see Katherine Turpin, *Branded: Adolescents Converting from Consumer Faith*, Youth Ministry Alternatives (Cleveland: Pilgrim, 2006).

a powerful rubric through which to help children with all of these issues, I will make my case for the practice of hospitality with at-risk youth and traumatized children.²⁶¹

At-Risk Youth

At-risk youth are not necessarily teenagers who have done anything wrong or who have experienced trauma. At-risk youth are adolescents living in environments linked to certain antecedent risk factors, lacking protective forces in their communities, facing the daily choice of behaviors that will bring connected outcomes, positive or problematic.²⁶² Burt, Resnick and Novick list three critical antecedent risk factors for adolescents: family environment (dysfunction, support, parenting style, violence or abuse, and substance abuse), poverty (living space, diet, clothing, access to medical services), and neighborhood (environment, but also schools, protective services, and health care).²⁶³ As any factor or combination of factors worsens, the risk experienced by youth in that setting escalates; at risk becomes high risk. Awareness of such factors can allow the community to bring preventative practices to bear so as to reduce risk and diminish negative consequences. Often, though, at-risk youth become troubled youth before interventions can take place. Such crisis impels either family or community to expel such youth from their midst.

²⁶¹ I will not describe any response in detail, as this exceeds the scope of this thesis. I will connect hospitality and treatment methods for youth to demonstrate the value of making ongoing hospitable adaptations by a residential child care community desirable as a strategy that moves it toward functionality as truly therapeutic community.

²⁶² Burt, Resnick, and Novick, *Building Supportive Communities*, 39. Antecedent risk factors follow. Protective factors include individual competencies, parental competencies, other interested adults, neighborhood resources, and effective schools and community institutions.

²⁶³ Burt, Resnick, and Novick, *Building Supportive Communities*, 41-45.

Robert Dykstra directly connects the effectiveness of the therapeutic environment for troubled youth with its ability to provide a place of safety and hope.²⁶⁴ Yet troubled adolescents are often unable to separate their self-image from that of their dysfunctional family system, tend to be equally ill-equipped to discern between a true and false self-image, and thus become “brittle” in the face of change. Consequently, Dykstra asserts that they struggle with change in the present and are unable to imagine a future beyond their current condition. Youth emerging from a healthy environment with a strong self-image are flexible enough to grow into a new identity. Troubled young people, though, often act out when faced with change. If they are somehow unintentionally successful in growing or adapting to new circumstances, they too frequently subvert the new behavior and revert to their old habits and identity. In their exercise of personal boundaries, two extremes are possible; either their self will be so “porous” that anyone can enter their life and flavor their conduct with the most outrageous behavior, or else their self will acquire a shell so thick that no one can approach them for an intimate sharing of place and conversation.²⁶⁵

For such young people to find healing, they must first find a safe place and people within this place who keep their promises about making such a place secure.²⁶⁶ It is difficult for counseling alone to produce such a safe environment without the nurture of a hospitable community. Too often the family system is too dysfunctional to allow young

²⁶⁴ Robert C. Dykstra, *Counseling Troubled Youth* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1997), 81-89.

²⁶⁵ Dykstra, *Counseling Troubled Youth*, 82. “The boundaries of the disordered self seem opened entirely to invasion from another, or cordoned off by shame or rage from every intimate relation with another.”

²⁶⁶ Dykstra, *Counseling Troubled Youth*, 83. “A person will not reveal dreaded impulses or desires, or reexperience threatening memories of past abuse or socially unacceptable aspects of one’s conscious or unconscious self, unless it is first safe to do so.”

people to feel safe. Therapeutic counseling, coupled with immersion in a nurturing, hospitable community such as a residential child care facility provides the milieu conducive to healing. Even so, troubled youth will test this safe environment with unsafe behavior toward themselves or others that tempts counselors or youth workers to react with an abuse of power or a failure to keep their promise. “Troubled young people, after all, can pose an almost limitless range of potential tests of safety to those who would assist them, but from this intense and intricate relational dance is fashioned embryonic hope.”²⁶⁷

Ultimately though, emphasizes Dykstra, only from the horizon of the eschatological future of Jesus Christ can troubled youth and their treatment community look back and reinterpret the truth of suffering in such a manner as to find a way to realize that hope in the future.

Christian theology’s bold claim is that one particular future promises therapeutic safety for sustaining hope in the midst of even severe negations to life of evil and injustice, and natural disaster and death—namely, the future of Jesus Christ. . . . The cross demands that ultimate hope must never be identified with wishful thinking or escapist behavior but instead be grounded in the suffering and shame of embodied human life. The resurrection, on the other hand, insists that even the ultimate “reality principle” of realistic suffering, evil, and death will be superseded by a finally more real “pleasure principle” beyond all earthly imagining, and that no abandonment in life or death will be able to separate God from God’s creation.²⁶⁸

Resurrection without suffering is mere escape; suffering without hope tempts to despair. In the tension between the truth of suffering and the hope of the resurrection is found the hospitality of the kingdom of God.

²⁶⁷ Dykstra, *Counseling Troubled Youth*, 86.

²⁶⁸ Dykstra, *Counseling Troubled Youth*, 89.

Victims of Childhood Trauma

Living in a challenging environment or even experiencing a troubled youth does not constitute childhood trauma.²⁶⁹ Serene Jones characterizes the traumatic event: “A traumatic event is one in which a person or persons perceive themselves or others as threatened by an external force that seeks to annihilate them and against which they are unable to resist and which overwhelms their capacity to cope.”²⁷⁰ Jones then explains that this description requires seven conditions. (1) Traumatic events are a different order of magnitude from other bad experiences. (2) Such an event is traumatic only if the subject perceives it to be life-threatening. (3) Trauma is grounded in a real event. (4) The traumatized person witnesses the event as a victim or bystander. (5) The life-threatening action targets individuals or communities. (6) Such action produces long-term assaults on the psyche as well as short-term attacks on the body. (7) Finally, the event and its residual effects are overwhelming.²⁷¹ Since the effects of the trauma become evident after the event, psychologists refer to this problem as posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

Herman vividly describes the symptomatology of this disorder:

Traumatized people feel utterly abandoned, utterly alone, cast out of the human and divine systems of care and protection that sustain life. Thereafter, a sense of

²⁶⁹ For example, some claim the placement of a child in a foster care or residential child care context can be a traumatic event for that child. While I concede the possibility that this might happen, some qualifications seem appropriate. First, most professionals involved in placing children outside the home seek to minimize trauma. Those professionals too often must weigh the possible trauma of changing environment against other more egregious traumas known to be ongoing in the home environment. Still, those caring for such children must be aware of both traumas and devise treatment plans that address them. Second, what most children experience in the transition from the home environment to care outside the home is not trauma, but a disruption of their wishes. This contravention of their wills is sometimes a necessary “violence” for their own safety and healing. For an understanding of what I mean by “violence” in this context, please revisit that discussion in the hermeneutic of hospitality on pp. 36-38.

²⁷⁰ Serene Jones, *Trauma and Grace: Theology in a Ruptured World* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2009), 13. This characterization is consistent with the longer description in the APA’s *DSM IV*, 424-25.

²⁷¹ Jones, *Trauma and Grace*, 13-15.

alienation, of disconnection, pervades every relationship, from the most intimate familial bonds to the most abstract affiliations of the community and religion. When trust is lost, traumatized people feel that they belong more to the dead than to the living.²⁷²

The overwhelming loss in trauma is not merely the loss of safety, although that is considerable; the great loss is relationship. Since, as we have seen (p.113), relationships are the conduits for resources in the lives of children, the symptoms of trauma bring devastating poverties.

Although even just a few years ago some therapists considered children resilient enough to recover from trauma on their own, most practitioners now understand children to suffer long-term effects from trauma.²⁷³ Recovery from the effects of PTSD is a difficult, and very often, a complex process. Herman describes it:

Recovery unfolds in three stages. The central task of the first stage is the establishment of safety. The central task of the second stage is remembrance and mourning. The central task of the third stage is reconnection with ordinary life. Like any abstract concept, these stages of recovery are a convenient fiction, not to be taken too literally. They are an attempt to impose simplicity and order upon a process that is inherently turbulent and complex.²⁷⁴

The stages of this healing process resonate with the movements of hospitality we have discovered in this study.²⁷⁵ Stage 1 parallels hospitality's welcome into a safe place. Stage 2 connects with the staying together, the sharing of story in hospitality. Stage 3

²⁷² Judith Herman, *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence—from Domestic Abuse to Political Terror* (New York: Basic, 1992), 52.

²⁷³ "If anything, children are more vulnerable to trauma than adults." Bruce D. Perry and Maia Szalavitz, *The Boy Who Was Raised as a Dog: And Other Stories from a Child Psychiatrist's Notebook: What Traumatized Children Can Teach Us about Love, Loss, and Healing*, (New York: Basic Books, 2006), 38-41.

²⁷⁴ Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 155.

²⁷⁵ I connect those stages with the use of space, p. 26, and with the definition of hospitality, p. 54.

corresponds with the sending out equipped to survive in the outside world. Yet the connections between the healing process and hospitality are more than structural.

Hospitality begins with the tensive virtues of safety and vulnerability; the guest must feel safe, sometimes at the cost of the vulnerability of the host. In the therapeutic process for PTSD, the client must experience that same quality of environment. In order to have a safe place, that place must be occupied by safe people.²⁷⁶ Only when safety has been established in stage 1 can the vulnerable young person reveal the narrative of trauma and grief to their counselor (stage 2). That story will be told only if the community remains open to hear it and avoids being too “holy” to refrain from repressing it.²⁷⁷ The community should expect that the presence of a troubled young person in this environment will test, sometimes severely, its hospitality.²⁷⁸ For the young person, the tests take the shape of new relationship formation and personal change; for the community, the trials brought by the young outsider are the tests of safety, the explorations of boundaries, and the call to suffer alongside these hurting youth.

Eventually these young people must learn strategies that allow them to protect their own safety. Safety education can begin, though, only after a significant portion of

²⁷⁶ “Our group and others had observed that the nature of a child’s relationships—both before and after trauma—seemed to play a critical role in shaping their response to it. If safe, familiar, and capable caregivers were available to children, they tended to recover more easily, often showing no enduring negative effects of the traumatic event.” Perry and Szalavitz, *The Boy Who Was Raised as a Dog*, 66.

²⁷⁷ For a description of trauma narratives, their significance, and their hopeful connections with “happy endings,” see Judith A. Cohen, Anthony P. Mannarino, and Esther Deblinger, *Treating Trauma and Traumatic Grief in Children and Adolescents* (New York: Guilford, 2006), 24-27; 127-29.

²⁷⁸ Perry and Szalavitz, *The Boy Who Was Raised as a Dog*, 55. Sometimes the perception of being deliberately tested is accurate, and sometimes it is a misperception. “The responses of traumatized children are often misinterpreted. . . . Attempting to take control of what they believe is the inevitable return of chaos, they appear to ‘provoke’ it in order to make things feel more comfortable and predictable. Thus, the ‘honeymoon’ period in foster care will end as the child behaves defiantly and destructively in order to prompt familiar screaming and harsh discipline. . . . This response to trauma can often cause serious problems for children when it is misunderstood by their caretakers.”

the trauma narrative has emerged, else the child may misunderstand the new information as an indictment of their perceived failure to prevent their own trauma.²⁷⁹ After a time within an environment made safe by others, the hope of the community is that children will be able to learn responses empowering them to secure a safe place for themselves.²⁸⁰ Thus having explored the painful truth of their history, they are able to move into a hopeful future equipped for the next part of their story.

Thus far this work has presented evidence that shows the value of hospitality as a framework for ministry to children that is consistent with the practice and imperatives of Jesus. The practice of hospitality with children who come from beyond the boundaries of the church or who struggle with realities putting them at-risk is at least as important as is hospitable practice with children within the community. Such hospitality allows those who perceive themselves to be outsiders to find welcome among the people of God, and for some the exchange of hospitality brings them into a nurturing community that brings their healing and health: spiritual, emotional, mental, and physical. This study has found certain practices that shape a community into a hospitable one. The question now remains: “What specific language, actions, symbols, and rituals constitute the day-to-day practice of hospitality?”

Hospitality and Praxis

How would a community espousing the theology described in this work appear in practice? The answer to questions of praxis requires us to leave prescriptions of theology

²⁷⁹ Cohen, Mannarino, and Deblinger, *Treating Trauma and Traumatic Grief*, 94-95; 157-65. “This postponement is important because the narrative is intended to reflect the child’s actual experience and response at the time, not what the child thinks he/she should have done” (94).

²⁸⁰ Such protections may not be perfect and need to include a plan to report problems or to secure help in the event that children do not have adequate resources to guard their own safety.

for contextually generic settings and enter into a specific context. Here I will consider ways in which Westview intuitively embodied the hospitable community in its ministry with at-risk children before enacting the intervention this work describes. As I reflect on the praxis of this community to consider its symbols, actions, and language, I leave prescriptive theology for a consideration of the descriptive.

In Westview's practice of hospitality with children, certain symbols loom large. First of these symbols is the house.²⁸¹ The house represents safety, providence, and rest. For the young men who come to Hollis, the concept of the home stands in opposition to places from which they may have come: an unsheltered space, a crowded apartment with inadequate facilities, a dwelling full of electronic toys but seldom adults, or an impersonal institutional dormitory with rotating shifts of supervisors. For the Westview team, the term house represents both the structure and the community that lives and works within it, and consequently, home implies relationship as much as it does resource.²⁸² Inside each house at Westview are smaller places loaded with symbolism: kitchen, pantry, and bedroom. Although both pantry and kitchen represent resources and their abundance, the kitchen is also a space where fellowship and the deepening of relationships are most common. At the table, itself a rich symbol, the line between host and guest is blurred as all share a single piece of furniture as they partake of a common prayer and meal. The bedroom represents more than rest; it also stands for a privacy of place and person. The community recognizes that relationships and transparency have

²⁸¹ Although residential child care facilities used to call their houses "cottages," most have discontinued the practice as outsiders so frequently misunderstand the misnomer. Westview has for several years worked to change its vocabulary to one more readily understood by its residents and constituency.

²⁸² Matson, *Household Conversion Narratives*, 44-45. This parallels Luke's use of "house."

differing levels of commitment and are not built overnight. Therefore, room for private time and thought is essential.

At Westview, certain actions carry significant theological freight: inviting, accepting, entering, welcoming, exemplifying, respecting, listening, healing, and mentoring. Prominent among these actions is inviting. Invitation calls the outsider into hospitality and is the first move of an appropriately virtuous open community. Well-informed about the challenging, dangerous, and sometimes traumatic issues that have made these young men into outsiders, the Westview community extends invitations to them to come live in its midst.²⁸³ Acceptance of the invitation is a matter of free will for each young man.²⁸⁴ Entry represents more than access to a house; it implies the first step of admission into the safe community within that structure. House parents extend welcome but also make clear that boundaries make safety possible. As moral exemplars, they show that these boundaries are workable and valuable. Initially the community offers and expects respect; in time, love grows to augment that respect.²⁸⁵ As the boys abide in the house with their surrogate family, one of the most important actions house parents take is to stop to listen. Listening requires a persistent presence. House parents listen for worries, hopes, questions, hurts, victories, losses, traumas, and stories. In the safe and patient presence of these Christians, the gradually revealed narrative gives clues

²⁸³ As much as some might like Westview to invite every applicant into community, several issues make this unwise: (1) the responsibility first to do no harm, which requires that Westview accept only young men whom it can help, (2) the necessity of protecting current residents and staff families from unreasonable risk, and (3) the refusal to have Westview serve as a place of punishment instead of a place of healing. Westview extends invitations only to young men who agree to come. The colloquial expression often used for this action is “taking them in.”

²⁸⁴ Sometimes the choices young men face are not easy or pleasant. Some, for example, may find themselves with the choice of accepting an invitation to Westview or being sent to juvenile detention.

²⁸⁵ *Westview Boys' Handbook*, 2-5. The Westview community operates under the simple ethical rubric of respect God, others, self, nature, and property.

as to the larger context, culture, and storyline of a young life. The insight gained allows relationships to deepen, brings the proper resources to bear, and makes healing possible. Healing is not merely mental; members of the community take each young man for physicals, dental checkups, and optometric examinations.²⁸⁶ As young men find health and hope, some discover spiritual healing. Eventually, the boys become the hosts who offer welcome to visitors in their home. They also bring into their community the young men that follow them, offering relationship and, if accepted, mentoring.

The true test of the hospitality of this community, though, is the failure of some boys to receive it. These struggles require perhaps the most profound of ministerial acts: suffering alongside someone. As young men suffer the natural consequences of poor decisions, the community suffers with them. The extreme happens when a youth comes, stays for a while, and then leaves in search of freedom. When young men turn eighteen years old, they are legally adults and can make their own choices. They do not always choose well. More than once a young man just months from his high school graduation has packed his bags and taken off on his own. The parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32) has thus been enacted numerous times at Westview. Yet some prodigals, after a time, call and ask to return.

One case illustrates the point. During a late winter snowstorm in Montana, an eighteen year-old prodigal called his Westview mentor from a pay phone. After several months out on his own, Wes²⁸⁷ wanted to return to his home of two years: Westview. He was cold, hungry, and out of money. The Westview community agreed to bring Wes back

²⁸⁶ It is not uncommon for a boy's first visit to the dentist or the optometrist to be at Westview.

²⁸⁷ The name of the youth and other details have been changed to protect the young man's identity.

into its midst, but asked that he first visit his mother in order to reassure her about his well-being. The Westview team sent a bus ticket and cash to Wes; these allowed him to get to his mother's house in Cleveland. Meanwhile, his mentor flew to meet Wes at the bus station. He rented a car, took Wes to buy some clean clothes, drove him to the hotel to let him clean up, and then went with him to see his mother. This surrogate parent then drove 1,300 miles to bring his young charge home to Hollis. Westview was able to continue to help Wes move toward his dreams for his life. This story is an enactment of the parable of Jesus on the contemporary horizon.

Much of the Westview community's practical theological language speaks to the symbols and actions mentioned above. Other positive language describes virtues that are valued: truthfulness, promise-keeping, transparency, consistency, and responsibility. Negative language speaks to vices the community finds harmful: agitating, manipulating, lying, cheating, stealing, threatening, disrespecting, and triangulating.²⁸⁸ Some of the most important language is relational: respecting, belonging, and loving.

This account details components of the practice of hospitality as the Westview community understood it before beginning this project and encountering the theology developed in this study. In Westview's mixture of intuitive practices, Christian tradition, and social science, it already embodies some of the characteristics of the hospitable community envisioned by Jesus. Yet this community, and indeed any community, finds possibilities for growth in the quest to enact the just hospitality of Jesus. The nature of

²⁸⁸ Relational triangulation is an anti-social move in which the perpetrator manipulates the emotions and actions of two other people by feeding them different narratives that bring the two into conflict with each other while causing the perpetrator to appear to be a friend to both.

just hospitality and the character of the hospitable community of Jesus have been the foci of this chapter.

Conclusion

This chapter began with a section that developed fundamental resources for the understanding of hospitality. The resulting tools of vocabulary, motives, and contextual practices enable an understanding of the Mediterranean background of hospitality for the communities among which Jesus ministered. As we considered Lukan accounts of hospitality, certain realities became apparent: (1) hospitality is an integral part of the *missio Dei*, particularly in the practice of Jesus; (2) Jesus reshaped hospitality in his practice of it; (3) he called his people to practice this spiritual discipline so as to bring peace between God and the outsider; and (4) hospitality is the God-given means of the people of God to minister to children. How are these realities significant?

First, hospitality is more than an interesting theme in the gospel accounts; it is an enactment of the mission of God on this planet. In broad strokes, I have established through exegeses of several texts in Luke that God in all persons is a God of hospitality. Hospitality shaped the pattern of the ministry of Jesus, God funds all hospitality with divine providence, and the Holy Spirit is the holy guest of the human individual and community.

Second, God does not practice hospitality in the image of human hospitality; in the person and practice of Jesus there is a divine reordering of the discipline according to God's ancient purposes. The nature of this radical reconstruction becomes apparent through the use of another tool constructed in the prelude: the hermeneutic of hospitality. After shaping this hermeneutic from a dialogue among theological, philosophical, and

social science sources, I tested it through an examination of narratives of hospitality in Luke. The readings provided by this hermeneutic showed it to be useful in detecting just, flawed, and failed hospitality in the biblical texts. Consequently, the hermeneutic similarly empowers interpreters (or interpreting communities) to assess and redress the justice of hospitality present in contemporary human encounters, regardless of the form of resources (power, wealth, ideas), the kind of relationships (friend, stranger, or foe), or the domains (social work, church praxis, theology, philosophy, worship) involved in such encounters.

Third, this work has demonstrated that hospitality is central to the form and function of the Christian community. “Hospitality is the practice,” Sutherland properly asserts, “by which the church stands or falls.”²⁸⁹ Yet hospitality is not merely the practice of the church; it is also a fundamental feature of the identity of the kingdom of God. The communal character of the people of God empowers it to give and receive hospitality so as to bring peace between God and those outside the community of God. For such peace to be meaningful, the church must peacefully and hospitably negotiate its broad differences in experience, theology, and praxis. Through communal discernment, a Christian community may interpret and respond to its context to hospitably generate hospitable praxis. In particularly demanding ministries, communities may agree to covenants that shape such hospitable behavior.

Finally, as a consequence of the first three realities and as a result of the imperative of Jesus, Christian communities ought to practice hospitality toward children as an ongoing part of their identity and ministry. Such practice coheres with the overall

²⁸⁹ Sutherland, *I Was a Stranger*, 83.

importance of hospitality to the praxis of the church, the particular needs of children, and the transient nature of childhood. How ought a community ministering to children respond to these realities? How can the people of God rigorously enact the vision of Jesus for a community that welcomes and nurtures children? Chapter 3 describes the methodology of an intervention designed to facilitate the construction of a communal covenant intended to accomplish that very purpose. The intervention coheres with the theology of hospitality prescribed in this chapter.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Chapter 1 described the ministry setting at Westview, including a perspective of the ministry team and a broad description of the at-risk children that the team serves. Chapter 2 developed a theology of hospitality capable of interpreting ministry situations and supporting sustainable practices for ministry with children, including at-risk children. That theology requires more than the practice of theology as a useful tool; it prescribes that the character of the practicing community become hospitable. Such character necessitates that the community behave hospitably in all its dealings, both internal and external. Consequently, a community's decision making process and accountability process ought to cohere with its communal character. Chapter 2 demonstrated that communal discernment constitutes a hospitable decision-making process and that covenant enacts a powerful process to communally prescribe ethical behavior for community members and to hold them accountable for compliance. This chapter describes an intervention that allowed the Westview team to communally discern a practical theology for ministry to children in the shape of a communal covenant. The current chapter also outlines evaluative processes that gauge the success of the project. A community that improves the quality of its hospitality by communally discerning and enacting a covenant of hospitality has successfully engaged this process.

Summary of the Intervention

Because the theology of this intervention centers on hospitality, it was important for the sake of coherence to fashion the intervention into the shape of a hospitable conversation. Therefore, this intervention provided the necessary resources: place, time, information, food, and writing materials. Together, these comprised a hospitable place. Such a place allowed all members of the treatment team to feel welcomed and empowered to participate in the relationship of peers in this process.¹ The intent was for the communal process to model the theology of hospitality described by chapter 2 of this thesis.

Ministry Intervention

The team gathered in their regular meeting place on Thursdays about 10:30 a.m. Although those sessions were originally planned to last one hour, they tended to continue for about one and one half hours. This length of time allowed the team to freely participate in the rituals and conversation involved in each session. Regular weekly staff meetings preceded these sessions, with a coffee break between the two gatherings. The buffer helped prevent tardy arrivals for hospitality sessions. Westview provided child care for participants with small children, and the sessions coincided with school hours so that the schools could care for the older children. Caring for children off-site helped relieve concerns about time, attention, and content. The sessions were a time to literally break bread together; lunch immediately followed each session and allowed for a

¹ John Swinton and Harriet Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research* (London: SCM, 2006), 244-53.

spillover of discussion. Westview provided the meals; team members sometimes brought other items as they chose.

Although some aspects of the intervention involved resources (space, time, and meals, for example), I chose in this context to focus upon hospitable practices that tend to develop relationships, specifically, the hospitality of conversation and ideas within a community. Because the Westview team members already made it a practice to invite total strangers to their table and into their home to stay for extended periods of time, practices involving the sharing of resources already seemed highly developed. Indeed, for most members of this community, it might be easier to feed a stranger than to listen to the ideas of outsiders that sometimes seem radically opposed to their own. The inability to openly hear such views impedes the formation of relationships between insider and outsider. Yet as chapter 2 has shown, complete and sustainable access to resources is not possible without relationships.² Consequently, the practices involved in this intervention involved developing virtues that allow hospitable conversations, knowing that such conversations will build relationships that empower a deeper hospitality of both resources and relationships. Communal discernment and entering into covenant as described in chapter 2 are practices specifically empowering hospitable conversation.

Each session was shaped to conform to a particular ritual. Patrick Keifert argues that such ritual is a hospitable practice that gives comfort to participants, particularly those who perceive themselves to be outsiders.³ Such comfort empowers participation with the community. The ritual for each session contained the same basic components in

² See p. 113.

³ Keifert, *Welcoming the Stranger*, 109-116.

a consistent order: prayer time, dwelling in the word (described below), a group exercise, writing time (from session 3 onward), shared assignments, and closing questions. The amount of time allowed for each of these components varied from session to session.

The dwelling in the word segment as practiced in this intervention was a slightly modified variant of the practice described by Ellison and Keifert.⁴ They metaphorically connect dwelling in the word with the inviting and dwelling phases of hospitality.⁵ The practice began with a question to consider while listening to the text. A brief prayer introduced a time of silence, in the midst of which a reader delivered the text to the others. After the text was read, the hearers meditated on the meaning of the text and could jot quick notes if they wished. After a few moments of silence, the group divided itself into groups of two or three. Each week all participants were to team up with someone to whom they were not married and with whom they had not been grouped before. Ellison and Keifert use the expression “reasonably friendly-looking stranger.”⁶ In these groups, all of them would report to their peers the insights they had gained from the text in the hearing of it in this setting. The speaker’s peers would listen to these insights so as to be able to report them to the entire discernment team. After a few minutes of discussion, the groups would reassemble into the larger team, and each individual would report the observations of a peer.⁷ Rarely team members would need a reminder to report their

⁴ Pat Taylor Ellison and Patrick Keifert, *Dwelling in the Word* (St. Paul, MN: Church Innovations, n.d.), 9-10.

⁵ Ellison and Keifert, *Dwelling in the Word*, 7-8.

⁶ Ellison and Keifert, *Dwelling in the Word*, 9. Thus the very language describing the practice of dwelling in the word accesses the language of hospitality.

⁷ Ellison and Keifert, *Dwelling in the Word*, 11-13. This is an active listening exercise, but is also an enactment of a hospitality of ideas.

peer's thoughts and not their own observations, but when this was necessary, the team acted promptly to remind these speakers of their task.⁸

Individual team members assumed specific roles during these sessions. I served as the facilitator of the communal discernment process. I also provided primary theological expertise to the discernment team, planned the dwelling in the word segments, and designed the group exercises. Shiann Metheny served as the scribe, recording notes about ongoing written work on the covenant as well as assignments for individuals or teams who agreed to work on certain issues. The editor of the writing project was Julia Birney, house parent, who revised and corrected any written work on the covenant for proper form and content. Other members of the discernment team were the members of the treatment team. The team did not require house parents who were not on duty to attend meetings on their days off, but most chose to do so.

There was a clear protocol for the composition of the communal covenant. The scribe kept any required written notes on her computer. After each meeting, she posted the notes online at Google Docs⁹ so as to allow the entire team to assess, read, revise, or comment about the composition up to that point. The scribe advised the team by email when she had posted the document. All team members could propose updates or corrections. The scribe served as the arbiter of what corrections or additions went into the document. The editor edited the document online, emailed a copy to me, and printed out copies for the team to have at each session.

⁸ Ellison and Keifert, *Dwelling in the Word*, 51. Ellison and Keifert note that a failure to act in this way can "kill" the effectiveness of the practice of dwelling in the word.

⁹ Google Docs is a secure online location for a community of users to share documents, edit them, and keep track of the proposed changes. It is located at <http://docs.google.com>.

The objective was to discern communally, by the leading of the Spirit, a theological covenant for the team to use in its ministry to children. This meant the outcome might or might not conform with any degree of precision to the theology I had written initially to fund the intervention. Over the course of the sessions, the team took on the task of developing individual pieces of the theology, discussing them, and developing a written covenant, a task completed toward the end of the sessions. Though I served as the facilitator, I allowed the community the freedom to discern the amount of meeting time required, whether to meet more or less, or to work in smaller groups to address certain issues for the larger community to consider, if they thought this to be appropriate.

Description of Sessions

Session 1 had as its primary objective the introduction of the project and its various components. After prayer, the team began a dwelling in the word exercise with Luke 19:1-10 (Jesus and Zacchaeus) as the text. I asked individual team members to describe a time in their life when they had most felt like an outsider (like Zacchaeus). I then gave the team an overview of the project, including a description of the problem, the purpose, and the broad strokes of the project plan. Members of a team who had recently worked on an appreciative inquiry project reviewed their experience with communal discernment. The team left with a reading assignment: resource A from *Behavioral Covenants*.¹⁰

Session 2 had as its primary objective the development of the vocabulary used in the project. Following prayer time, the team practiced its dwelling in the word time with Luke 10:1-12 (Jesus sends the seventy-two) as the text. Following the text, I wove into

¹⁰ Rendle, *Behavioral Covenants*, 99-110.

the discussion the vocabulary of hospitality found in the first century Mediterranean world, vocabulary that bridges the gap between Luke 10:1-12 and Acts 10 (Peter and Cornelius). I then facilitated a group discussion of covenant and the functionality of a behavioral covenant based on the assigned reading from the previous week. The team's reading assignment for the next week was resources G, H, and I from *Behavioral Covenants*.¹¹

Session 3 sought as its objective the extension of the theological content of hospitality. After prayers, the team spent its dwelling in the word time with Genesis 18:1-15 (Abraham at the oaks of Mamre). I introduced the team to the hermeneutic of hospitality described in chapter 2 of this work. I then facilitated the team's work through a reading of Genesis 12:10-20 (Abram and Sarai in Egypt) using that hermeneutic. The team spent their remaining time talking about how what they had learned so far might have improved responses in cases of previous experience and how such learning might shape their covenant. The discussion attempted to connect these concepts with the examples given in the homework assignment from the previous week.

Session 4 had as its primary objective the review and integration of concepts learned thus far. Prayer time preceded dwelling in the word time; its text was John 2:1-11 (Jesus at the wedding in Cana). I asked the team to use the tool set they had developed thus far (vocabulary, hermeneutic, and theology) to interpret the situation in Luke 7:36-50 (Jesus at the house of Simon the Pharisee). I invited the team to list areas in which they would like additional theological insight, resources, or instruction to assist in the

¹¹ Rendle, *Behavioral Covenants*, 122-26.

construction of their covenant. The team used the remaining time to pursue the writing of the covenant. Homework was an assignment of reading resource F from Rendle.¹²

Session 5 pursued a primary objective of understanding the outsider. Because of a scheduling conflict, the team met on Wednesday of this week instead of Thursday. Following prayers, the team practiced its dwelling in the word with Luke 8:26-39 (the Gerasene demoniac). This text allowed team members to work with a text that described the profound lack of hospitality. I also encouraged them to find the ways the hospitable practices of Jesus changed reality for the demoniac. The team viewed excerpts from an episode of “Joan of Arcadia” that deals with the idea of insiders and outsiders among young people.¹³ This video resource provided a transition from the text to contemporary life, made the figure of the demoniac more believable, and assisted visual learners among the team to better understand the concepts of reading situations and practicing hospitality. I also exposed the team to concepts about the stranger from Volf’s *Exclusion and Embrace* and the idea of children as strangers. I encouraged the team to incorporate their learning into their covenant.

Session 6 had the primary objective of demonstrating the applicability of hospitality concepts to ministry with at-risk children. Following prayers, the team dwelt in the word at Genesis 21:8-21 (Hagar and Ishmael). Shiann Metheny¹⁴ led the team in a discussion of childhood causes of trauma, post traumatic stress disorder, and the

¹² Rendle, *Behavioral Covenants*, 120-21. There was no group assigned homework after session 4 to allow the group to assign homework to themselves for covenant writing time.

¹³ “The Uncertainty Principle,” episode 11 (originally aired 12/12/2003), disk 3, *Joan of Arcadia: The First Season*, DVD (Hollywood, CA: Paramount, 2003).

¹⁴ Shiann Metheny, MSMFT, LPC, has training and experience in the field of counseling traumatized youth, with over five years of experience as a team member at Westview at the time of this project.

connection of these subjects with Christian hospitality as she had understood it thus far. I also asked the team to imagine what it might be like to send a child away to Westview and to attempt to understand the feelings of trauma and alienation that might result. I encouraged team members to relate the most traumatic separation they had experienced in the departure of a child in care and to discuss ways the theological work the community had conceived might have provided tools to cope with such times of grief. Work on assembling new findings for the covenant continued. Toward the end of this session, team members decided to structure the covenant into three basic sections that parallel the moves of hospitality: welcome, staying, and sending out. Consequently, each team member committed to working with one of three teams, each of which would write one of these three sections over the coming week. I asked each of the three teams to use the knowledge gained thus far to produce a rough draft of its section of the covenant by session 8 of the communal discernment process. Between sessions 6 and 7, each of these three groups met separately and wrote the first drafts of their sections. These meetings lasted from one to four hours (the staying group was the largest and worked the longest).

Session 7 worked toward the primary objective of connecting the developed theology to specific ministry practices. After prayers, dwelling in the word focused on Luke 9:10-17 (Jesus feeds the five thousand). In this session, I called for final decisions about the covenant. Each of the three teams (welcome, staying, and sending out) presented rough drafts of its assigned section of the covenant of hospitality. After some discussion, the entire group decided to review these drafts in mixed teams, each of which contained members of the original teams and new members who also had a particular interest in that area. During thirty minutes of discussion, each team tended to reorganize

and reword at least part of its section of the covenant. In large part, the mixed teams affirmed the content of the covenant sections upon which they worked. The entire group then reassembled to discuss the covenant in its entirety. The communal discernment team gave some final suggestions to the writer and editor of the covenant at that time. They also discussed the importance of keeping this document publicly displayed in their houses and in the office. Finally, I challenged the team to plan a time of worship for session 8 that would honor God as witness to and participant in this covenant.¹⁵ Following this session, the group scribe and editor spent hours revising the document, composing the preamble, and taking it through two more substantially different drafts while remaining in dialogue with the discernment team. The team used email to handle those revisions.

Session 8 had as its primary objective the ratification of the covenant. Following the opening prayer, the team practiced dwelling in the word at Luke 22:7-23 (the Lord's Supper). The team passed the covenant among its members. I polled each team member, asking them to talk about the covenant as it had been written and to express their hopes and concerns about it. Once I verified the consensus of the group, the group signed the covenant. I then asked the worship leaders to enact their plan, including a reading of portions of the covenant. The worship plan included, among other things, a prayer for the community's keeping of the covenant. The moves of the worship plan cohered with the classical moves of worship and with the fundamental moves of hospitality: gathering, abiding, and sending out. After the worship, I thanked the team for their contribution of time, thought, insight, and experience to the project.

¹⁵ Essentially, the time of worship was a liturgy of covenant specifically shaped to this community and its agreement.

Method of Evaluation

I selected a qualitative research methodology for this research project for a number of reasons: first, qualitative research allows the researcher to gain knowledge of the “other.”¹⁶ Second, since this project centers on a theology of hospitality with the immersion of the researcher among the study group developing this theology, qualitative research methodology cohered more readily with the nature of the intervention than would have quantitative analysis. Two different screening tests also classified this project as one most suited to a qualitative methodology. First, Marshall and Rossman propose six tests, to which one or more positive responses identifies a qualitative methodology as the best approach for a particular research project. In Westview’s context, this project answered four of the six tests affirmatively.¹⁷ Second, Maxwell lists four “conceptual considerations” for making a positive decision for a qualitative approach; two of these concepts were relevant to Westview’s case.¹⁸

Beyond these screening tests, such a project must take into consideration the obstacles that bias and sample size represent for a quantitative approach to this project. The supposed impartiality of quantitative or qualitative analysis is an illusion; no

¹⁶ Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*, 33-34.

¹⁷ Catherine Marshall and Gretchen B. Rossman, *Designing Qualitative Research* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1995), as reported in Thomas Lee, *Using Qualitative Methods in Organizational Research* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1999), 41. The positive tests follow: “1. Is it important for the researcher to understand the in-depth processes that operate within the organization or industry?” “2. Do the research issues involve poorly understood organizational phenomena and systems?” “3. Is the researcher interested in the differences between stated organizational policies and their actual implementation?” “5. Does the study involve variables that do not lend themselves to experiments for practical or ethical reasons?”

¹⁸ Joseph A. Maxwell, *Qualitative Research Design: An Interactive Approach* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1996), as reported in Lee, *Using Qualitative Methods*, 41. The two positive tests: “1. Are the participants’ meaning or interpretations central to the research at hand?” “2. Is it important for the researcher to understand the participants’ experience context?” Again, one or more positive responses indicate a qualitative approach.

investigator is free of bias. An attempt at detachment would have been particularly difficult in my situation as leader of this ministry team for the last ten years.¹⁹ Qualitative research, though, allows the investigator to take appropriate countermeasures to deal with the bias inherent in any research. Such countermeasures are typically complex perspectives utilizing multiple research methodologies (see below). Quantitative analysis in this context was also problematic because the small institutional size of Westview did not permit a sample size producing a statistically significant dataset. Attempts to recruit other similar institutions to participate in similar projects in order to gain a larger sample would have been problematic for several reasons. First, such attempts are neither within the scope of a doctor of ministry thesis project nor consistent with the aims of a doctor of ministry program, one aim of which is to shape ministerial leadership in a specific ministry. Second, though other residential child care facilities perform similar work in similar ways, each of them is complex enough, and distinct enough, to make the isolation of variables required for quantitative work unwieldy.

Qualitative research has the advantage of providing a complex perspective. With multiple viewpoints of an event, different observers will perceive reality differently. Together their perspectives provide a complex and rich view of the same experience.²⁰ Since it is important to know the effect of this intervention at Westview,²¹ qualitative

¹⁹ Jeffrey A. Gliner and George A. Morgan, *Research Methods in Applied Settings: An Integrated Approach to Design and Analysis* (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 2000), 19-20.

²⁰ Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*, 35-36.

²¹ Chapter 1 delineates a number of ways in which Westview and its environment, organization, and practices are sufficiently unique to make quantitative methodologies difficult.

research allowed a study to be locally grounded.²² Qualitative research also allowed differing methodologies that were capable of providing additional evidence of the validity of this study.²³

Description of Specific Qualitative Methodology

In qualitative research, triangulation provides for a “thicker” interpretation of complex data. The four types of triangulation described by Denzin are (1) the use of a variety of data sources, (2) the use of a number of different evaluators, (3) perspectives generated by different theoretical approaches, and (4) various methods of study.²⁴ This study made use of the fourth option and, therefore, provided a complex perspective of this intervention by utilizing a triangulation of methods as described by Patton.²⁵ These three methods also incorporated three different points of view: the perspective of outsiders to the Westview organization, the insights of insider participants, and my perceptions as researcher.

Outside experts

I obtained evaluations from three outside experts. I sent a copy of the final covenant document along with a project brief to three different experts, each with unique perspectives of various fields: the theology of children, residential child care, and psychology. The project brief contained a description of the problem that prompted the

²² Lee, *Using Qualitative Methods in Organizational Research*, 39.

²³ John W. Cresswell, *Research Design: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1994), 150-51.

²⁴ Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln, *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2005).

²⁵ Michael Q. Patton, *How to Use Qualitative Methods in Evaluation* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1987), 60.

project, a statement of the purpose of the project, and a concise description of the methodology involved.²⁶ This brief gave the experts the requisite background information to gauge whether the intervention had been successful by its own standards. Each expert evaluated the community's covenant for its usefulness in the care of at-risk children. I present summaries of these reports in chapter 4. The three outside experts were Dr. Holly Allen, Dr. Harold Shank, and Dr. Ralph Richardson. Dr. Holly Allen is the Director of Children's and Family Studies at John Brown University and has expertise in theology and the education of children. Allen has published and edited work on the spirituality of children. Dr. Harold Shank is a professor of Old Testament at Oklahoma Christian University and the national spokesperson for the Christian Child and Family Services Association. He has written about child care and has a background in theology, particularly in the theology of children and social justice. Dr. Ralph Richardson is the executive director of Hope Harbor, a children's home in Claremore, Oklahoma; in that role, Richardson has experience with residential child care, and as a licensed psychologist he has expert knowledge of psychology. Richardson has served as an officer on the boards of both state and national child care organizations.

Insider participants

After the communal discernment group completed all eight sessions, I conducted informal interviews with each group member to evaluate their perspective of the process and product.²⁷ Those interviews attempted to ascertain individual perceptions of the

²⁶ The problem and purpose statements were excerpts from chapter 1; the methodology statement was extracted from this chapter (see "Ministry Intervention" above).

²⁷ Patton, *How to Use Qualitative Methods in Evaluation*, 110-11. Sharan B. Merriam, *Qualitative Research and Case Studies Applications in Education* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1998), 72-74.

utility of the covenant in ministering to children. The interviews began with a global question: “If God would grant you three wishes for the ministry at Westview, what would they be?”²⁸ If this question elicited an adequate response²⁹ from the interviewee, then I asked no more questions. If not, then I followed up with these questions: “How has discerning the covenant changed how you feel about your ministry to our boys?” “In what ways do you think that the covenant can help our team make Westview a better place for all of us to live?”³⁰

The interview protocol was as follows. I interviewed participants one-on-one, and semi-privately (alone, but with possible passing traffic) in the Westview library or my office so as to provide a hospitable and casual location for the conversation. I introduced the questions (described above) into a larger conversation. I observed how the participant behaved, paused, answered, or did not answer throughout the interview, making rough notes. I listened for language that may have been learned during the course of the intervention as well as the answers to the interview questions.

Immediately after the interview I wrote field notes on the interview. Using rough notes from the field to recall key words, phrases, and event sequence, I recorded each session’s notes on the computer in a separate Microsoft Word file immediately after the

²⁸ This question takes the shape of the hypothetical question as described by Merriam, *Qualitative Research*, 77.

²⁹ The adequacy of a response was gauged based on whether the interviewer felt the respondents had fully voiced their evaluation of the covenant and the process.

³⁰ These questions followed the style of questions used in an appreciative inquiry process and described by Mark Lau Branson, *Memories, Hopes, and Conversations: Appreciative Inquiry and Congregational Change* (Herndon, VA: Alban, 2004), 67-72.

meeting to avoid an “erosion of memory.”³¹ I derived this procedure from the guidelines for interviews found in Patton.³² I scheduled adequate time to record complete field notes considering the length of the sessions (up to four hours of writing for each hour in the field). Most of these sessions were completed within twenty minutes. I wrote these notes before further discussing these events with others. Once the file was recorded, I did not modify it later. I inductively analyzed data for recurring themes and concepts and tracked these in a separate Word file. I tried theories derived from an inductive analysis of the data, tested that analysis deductively, and retested the analyses continually as new data arrived.³³ After these interviews and the accompanying analysis were completed, I prepared the results for presentation in chapter 4.

Field notes

I kept field notes of all of the intervention sessions myself. The observation method was that described by Merriam. Rough reminders were recorded in the field, including a chart of the location of participants present at each meeting, observations of what people did and how they interacted, and the flow of the conversation, noting who was speaking and who was not.³⁴ I also made mental notes of non-verbal behavior, particularly silent reactions to the conversation. Additionally, I watched for other subtle factors: asides, missing events or silences, and uses of symbolic language. I digitally recorded each session with a laptop computer using Sony Sound Forge Audio Studio.

³¹ Bruce Berg, *Qualitative Research Methods for the Social Sciences*, 3rd ed. (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1998), 146. Berg’s caution about field notes is also applicable to interviews.

³² Patton, *How to Use Qualitative Methods in Evaluation*, 138-43.

³³ Lee, *Using Qualitative Methods*, 45-47.

³⁴ Merriam, *Qualitative Research*, 94-98.

This software enabled me to enhance the audio at times when a participant spoke too softly or when background noises occasionally covered a word or phrase. The recordings were not completely transcribed, but served as an aid to my memory of the speakers, narrative sequence, and accuracy of quoted expressions from the sessions. I transferred the recordings from the recording device to a digital file on the computer and made a back-up copy. After a successful defense of the project thesis, the recordings were discarded. I recorded each session's notes on the computer in a separate Microsoft Word file immediately after the meeting to avoid an "erosion of memory," as described by Berg.³⁵ I worked from my rough notes from the field to recall key words, phrases, and event sequence. I blocked out time in my schedule to allow enough time to record complete field notes because of the length of the sessions (up to four hours for each one hour in the field). I wrote these notes before further discussing these events with others. Once I recorded the file, I did not modify its content later.

Data Evaluation

Evaluation of the data in these field notes was ongoing and tentative while the intervention was in progress.³⁶ I inductively analyzed the data for recurring themes and concepts and tracked these in a separate Word file. I tried theories derived from the inductive analysis, tested that analysis deductively, and retested the analysis continually as new data arrived.³⁷ I pursued the analysis by looking for ways that this community enacts hospitality; behaviors, statements, and allusions connected to hospitality, and the

³⁵ Berg, *Qualitative Research Methods for the Social Sciences*, 146.

³⁶ Lee, *Using Qualitative Methods*, 46.

³⁷ Lee, *Using Qualitative Methods*, 45-47.

theology implied by these; and silences or slippages that indicate areas of interest or concern.

After the last session, I sent the covenant to the outside experts for their independent evaluation. At the same time, I began individual interviews with members of the discernment group. As the data from these multiple perspectives became available, I re-engaged the data analysis process described above in search of new insights and explanations. After that analysis began to solidify, I completed and reported the analysis in chapter 4.

Conclusion

The purpose of this project was to facilitate the creation of a covenant defining the practice of hospitality towards children. I sought to lead the team toward the communal discernment of that covenant by working alongside them in eight sessions over a two month period. Each of these sessions began with the spiritual practices of prayer and dwelling in the word and contained in varying amounts teaching from the Christian tradition, experiential exercises, memory of communal experiences, and communal discernment. At the same time that this community considered hospitality as a rubric for their practice of ministry, the very process itself enacted the principles of hospitality that this work espouses. The eight sessions concluded with a time of worship to solemnify the community's agreement to the practice of this covenant. At the core of this work is hospitality as lived out in the life of Jesus Christ, and this project served to empower this community to hospitably discern a covenant that served as a commitment to interpret the community's world and shape its practices so as to replicate the hospitality of Jesus in our communal and individual lives. As hospitality is core to the dealings of God with

humanity, so ought hospitality be the essential element of our ministry with children. I developed the qualitative research procedures in this chapter to evaluate how well this intervention served its purpose in forming a viable covenant. Chapter 4 presents the results of this research.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

Chapter 1 described the ministry setting at Westview, detailed a set of problems that prompted this intervention, and designated the purpose of this project to “facilitate the creation of a covenant defining the practice of hospitality towards children.”¹ In order to theologically fund this covenant, chapter 2 developed a theology of hospitality for ministry with children, including the at-risk children Westview serves. Chapter 3 presented an intervention using communal discernment to empower the Westview team to compose, over an eight-week period, a covenant describing its hospitable practices. The third chapter also outlined a qualitative research methodology to evaluate the effectiveness of the process. The current chapter reviews the results of the qualitative evaluation of the intervention from a triangulation of perspectives: my field notes, interviews with individual project participants, and evaluations from three independent experts. Throughout this discussion of the results of the intervention, the communally discerned covenant remains at the center of the conversation. A copy of that covenant is presented in appendix C, Our Covenant of Hospitality at Westview Boys’ Home.²

¹ The complete purpose statement can be found on p. 15.

² Appendix C presents the covenant precisely as composed and structured by the communal discernment team.

Field Notes

In a staff meeting previous to session 1, I gave the discernment team a brief preview of the process and the logistical arrangements (meals, child care, etc.) surrounding it. After reviewing an informed consent form (appendix A), I asked each team member to sign if they wished to participate. I reiterated the voluntary nature of this project. I then asked the team to think, over the week ahead, about times in their lives when they had experienced being an outsider. I asked them to make notes, if they were willing, about the experience and to be prepared to share them during the first session.

The Eight Sessions

Session 1

Session 1 had as its primary objective the introduction of the project and its various components. I began by describing the overall project and elaborating on the problems I expected it to address, the purpose of the project, and what I hoped communal discernment of a covenant would allow us to accomplish as a group. We then moved to our dwelling in the word time. Even though several of the participants had previously experienced dwelling in the word exercises, I began the session with an explanation of how to engage in such an experience. We began dwelling in the word at Luke 19:1-10, the narrative about Jesus and Zacchaeus. As we listened to the text being read, I asked them to consider the question “How does this text find me as an outsider, as a Zacchaeus?” As we reported our experience of the text, most of us were able to sympathetically imagine how Zacchaeus might have felt during this episode. One person imagined that Zacchaeus was someone who wanted to be hidden; some found his status

to be a result of life choices; others thought that the community surrounding Zacchaeus had forced his outsider status. As the team described Zacchaeus, most described him as an historical person. One participant visualized Zacchaeus as a young man who had been a resident at Westview. This observation was important to the team in order for them to begin to understand how residents feel as outsiders to the community. Four participants actually entered into the role of Zacchaeus personally; they connected his narrative to their personal narrative.³

After all had been able to share their experience of the text, I noted that because we tend to belong to many communities, we often forget what it is like to be an outsider. I then said, “Tell me about being an outsider. Help us experience that.” Seven team members (out of fourteen) were prepared and able to share their personal experience as outsiders. Three people told stories from their teen years; two offered narratives from adult experiences; two shared experiences as a teenager and as an adult. This sharing time was heart-felt and often emotional. The outsider experiences expressed eventually shaped the covenant in that the community designed it to welcome and integrate those outside of the community into it as quickly as possible. In fact, the word “outsider” is used once in the covenant, and there it acknowledges that all community members once held that status.⁴

During the design phase of the project, the strength of our community had caused me to be concerned about the team’s ability to take and comprehend the vantage point of the outsider. Various exercises were imagined and designed to attempt to help the team

³ Interestingly, three out of these four people (two men, one woman) were the tallest team members.

⁴ The preamble of the covenant states, “We will abide by these practices together with the awareness that all of us started our time with the Community as outsiders.” See appendix C.

experience outsider status, but significant design problems emerged. First, the team could not have outsider experiences together because any two or more of us combined would constitute a self-sufficient community in the midst of a larger context. Second, it seemed difficult to budget the time and resources to arrange for fourteen people to have separate outsider experiences. Third, I was concerned that even well-intentioned and designed outsider experiences could get out of control and result in unintentional harm. Session 1 proved that I did not have to generate these experiences. All of those participating in this project had a reservoir of outsider experiences that they, when asked and willing, could access, share, and utilize in order to sympathetically imagine the outsider experiences of other people besides themselves.⁵ In fact, we discovered outsider narratives experienced by team members who had yet to process them fully.

After the group finished its discussion of the ideas of hospitality and being an outsider in session 1, I listed several observations in my field notes. First, the discernment team understood some of the problems involved with hospitality and outsider status, but they still had a fairly narrow view of those words and their implications. Much of the discussion of outsiders in this session, for example, was focused on the external appearance of the outsider. Although the Zacchaeus narrative might tend to elicit that response, there are other issues involved with outsider status, both for Zacchaeus and for contemporary outsiders. Second, the group neither had a very well-developed vocabulary to describe the problems they were experiencing as a community nor any solutions to problems they might find. Third, the team had no obvious pre-existing theoretical

⁵ Martha C. Nussbaum, *Cultivating Humanity: A Classical Defense of Reform in Liberal Education* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 85-112. Here the discussion of Martha Nussbaum about sympathetic and narrative imagination is very helpful.

structures to provide a framework for their ongoing discussions. I began to address these issues in the next session.

Session 2

Session 2 had as its primary objective the development of the vocabulary used in the project. The meeting began with the dwelling in the word segment, which used Luke 10:1-12, Jesus sends the seventy-two, as the text. I asked the team to listen for what the text promises or provides us in relationships and resources. Next, we discussed their insights into the text. One half of the group mentioned both resources and relationships in their response. Of the remaining half, all but one focused on relationships. One participant insightfully connected the two by noting, “The resources that are provided are actually provided by our relationships.”⁶ This concept later emerged in the third move of the covenant: principles and practices of sending out from the community. Here the community engaged itself to “equip them [the boys] with sustainable relationships, knowing they have a Community that will love and support them when they need assistance in life,” and “send them out with resources, commensurate with the time spent within the Community, whether those resources are material, spiritual, and/or physical.”

Participants repeatedly differentiated contemporary logic from the logic of Jesus. The logic of Jesus requires that we rely upon God to provide instead of our excess, focus first on relationships and not resources, remain still instead of moving around, and build deep relationships instead of building many relationships. These observations prepared the team to understand that Jesus might view hospitality differently as well.

⁶ This concept correlates positively with the theology described in chapter 2; see p. 113.

One of the key differentiators of the hospitality of Jesus perceived by this community was his willingness to receive hospitality, not merely show it. The team's reading of Luke 10 led it to understand that team members should be as willing to receive hospitality from the young men in their care as to give it. Various participants began to imagine ways in which this might happen. This discussion later led them to include in the preamble of the covenant, "Though each Community member's role in offering hospitality will differ, each will offer it to his or her capacity."

As we moved to a period of teaching time, I helped them locate their discussion about relationship and resources within Pamela Couture's work on practical ministry to the poverties of children.⁷ I used the biblical narrative of Jephthah (Judg 11) to illustrate the shape that these poverties might take in the life of a young person. Going back to the text in Luke 10, I developed the vocabulary of hospitality in the ancient Mediterranean for the group.⁸ I also pointed out the consistent use of hospitality language in this text, Luke 9, and in the household conversion narratives in Acts. As a part of this discussion, I gave them a very brief overview of Arterbury and Matson's work with these texts.⁹

To facilitate the move out of teaching time and into discussion, I brought them into a discussion about the various motives and practices of hospitality. In the ensuing discussions about hospitality, participants used their native vocabulary to describe specific concepts, issues, and situations. As I responded to their comments, I affirmed their ideas, and as the opportunity arose, gave them new language in an effort to redirect

⁷ Discussed in this work in chapter 2, beginning on p. 113.

⁸ I did this using the vocabulary found in chapter 2 of this work (pp. 24-26). Although I explained that the vocabulary of hospitality was clearest in the Greek text, we confined our discussion to the English.

⁹ See pp. 81-86 of this work.

them toward a shared vocabulary. For example, a discussion about protecting family was renamed safety; a comment about “openness until the point you can be hurt” was relabeled vulnerability. My objective was to empower them to retain ownership of their ideas, while equipping them with a shared language enabling them to communicate more quickly, richly, and precisely about issues related to the practice of hospitality. The discussion was vigorous, and everyone present contributed something.

Session 3

The primary objective of session 3 was the extension of the theological content of hospitality, specifically, the hermeneutic of hospitality. During this session, the team dwelled together in the word at Genesis 18:1-15, Abraham at the oaks of Mamre. The question I asked them to consider was “How do you hear hospitality in this text?” As we discussed the narrative, the team made good use of the vocabulary they had gained during the previous session.

After our discussion, I entered into a period of teaching time in which I presented briefly the hermeneutic of hospitality.¹⁰ I presented the six virtues of that hermeneutic as tensive dyads: safety and vulnerability, holiness and openness, and truth and hope. As I presented this hermeneutic, I applied it to the narrative we had just considered in Genesis 18. This exercise helped the group understand how the hermeneutic functioned on a biblical text and allowed them to see the additional insight that the hermeneutic could glean from a text. I ended the time in Genesis 18 by noting the effort of the primary actors to balance the tensive virtues of hospitality and thus maintain the just character of this hospitable event.

¹⁰ Chapter 2, pp. 32-52.

To enter the discussion time, I distributed twelve cards with the six virtue words (safety, vulnerability, holiness, openness, truth, and hope) written on them.¹¹ I then asked the team to dwell in the word with me at Genesis 12:10-20 (Abram in Egypt), with each person listening for the concept of their word in that text. This particular text is an example of failed hospitality; using their words from the hermeneutic, the team quickly sorted out how Abram's failure to keep the virtues in tension led to a nearly disastrous outcome. Their discussion about Abram's obsession with his own safety at the cost of everyone else's inappropriate vulnerability was particularly perceptive. The team later incorporated the entire hermeneutic into its covenant as a proviso for situations not described in the covenant proper. The covenant closes with the following remarks (echoing the definition of hospitality found in chapter 2 of this work):

Though we have made an attempt to be inclusive in the construction of this Covenant, there are situations not addressed. The virtues utilized as a foundation in building this Covenant are the same ones to take into consideration when such is the case. These virtues that live in tension are: holiness/openness, hope/truth and safety/vulnerability.

As the group moved through their discussion of the Genesis 12 narrative, they suddenly realized that Abram's story was very much like the stories of some of our young men.¹² Our discussion quickly shifted as they discovered a number of parallels between the relationship linking Pharaoh and Abram and the relationship connecting house parents and young men in their care: unequal distribution of power and obsession with personal safety, for example. We pursued these connections to gain keener insight into our own narrative and our current practice of hospitality. Before this discussion,

¹¹ There were twelve persons present that day.

¹² In planning this session, I had hoped the team would make this jump on its own and without a cue from me. They did.

some of the group had voiced dissatisfaction with our practice of hospitality, but would have been unable to describe the problem or prescribe a solution. After this discussion, they began to believe that they understood what might be going wrong with hospitality in their world and to see that by properly using the virtues they might be able to find useful solutions.

After the third session, I remarked in my field notes that the mode of conversation had changed over the course of three weeks: from larger lecture sections (mostly from me) in session 1, to careful and lengthy observations from all participants in session 2, to real discussion and consensus building in session 3. The discussion had become more energetic over time, and the depths of some significant memories and emotions were being plumbed. This was particularly true as the team made connections between the narratives of our boys and those in the Bible. By this session, the team members found it very easy to move from the horizons of Abraham's life to the horizons of the lives of the young men in their care. At the end of the first session, only one or two small cues were required to stimulate such a jump; by the end of session 3, team members were making this mental leap on their own. Application of the text was frequently metaphorical.

There was still a tendency to focus too much on the pain that the team experiences as a result of relational traumas at Westview. Neither was there yet a sufficient understanding of the pain and the trauma of the boys in our care. Some uncertainty remained as to what would be needed for a complete covenant, a fact that I perceived to be healthy at this early juncture.

Session 4

The primary objective of session 4 was the review and integration of the concepts of hospitality learned by the team thus far. During the dwelling in the word time, we heard John 2:1-11, Jesus at the wedding in Cana. The question I asked the group to consider was “How do you hear relationships and resources in this text?” As the group discussed this pericope, they observed that resources can provide the opportunity for new relationships to begin or existing relationships to grow. I followed the discussion with a brief teaching time that connected this wedding feast with the last supper and the great eschatological banquet. The intent was to help them see that every hospitable event is an opportunity to enact the kingdom of God in anticipation of its complete realization.

I then divided the team into groups of three and gave them all the same assignment: using the vocabulary and the hermeneutic of hospitality, interpret Luke 7:36-50, Jesus at the house of Simon the Pharisee. After ten minutes of discussion, I asked them to report. The group found this passage to be full of the language of hospitality. They discovered the possibility of more than one approach to hospitality and believed more than one approach might be good. This observation later led the team to outline principles for the practice of hospitality instead of constructing detailed rule sets in its covenant. The team was careful not to require too many practices because of its perception that these different approaches to hospitality had value. Consequently, they later wrote, “The following principles are further illustrated by the practices listed below. The practices do not fully express the principles listed, but are representative. The practices put forth are examples of the minimum standards we covenant to enact.” This

concept also led to the inclusion of this line in the “staying” section of the covenant: “We will . . . look for and encourage the best in others and ourselves.”

At the same time, there were some approaches to hospitality (that of Simon in particular) that could at best be called inhospitable. The team considered the woman at the feet of Jesus to be the true host at this banquet and to be the one who demonstrated real hospitality. One of the group members was fascinated with the polite way that Jesus redirected Simon for his inhospitality: no attack, no sarcasm, just a quiet confrontation with a lesson in manners. Consequently, I gave the team a brief description of the symposium and told them that it is possible to interpret the polite actions and teaching response of Jesus in that light. The group then used this narrative to choose new words for their vocabulary of hospitality: anointing, forgiveness, love, and brought. Using their Bibles and interpretive tools, the group was able in forty minutes to approximate much of the exegesis of this narrative found in chapter 2 of this study.¹³ Consequently, I called their attention to two important facts. First, they had been able to find a much richer and more nuanced interpretation of the situation in this text through communal discernment than any of us would have been able to discover alone in the given time. Second, what we had constructed was an interpretation of reality, not reality itself. Just as we had discovered so many times with our young charges, one unexpected fact retains the potential to turn over an entire apple cart full of interpretations. This discussion eventually contributed to the team’s willingness to include a provision for revising the covenant in its preamble.

¹³ See pp. 59-62.

We spent the last part of our time listing ideas from this session that we would like to consider for the first draft of the covenant. Our scribe took notes and later posted these on Google Docs. A number of these concepts made it into the final document: using hopeful and safe language, the power of sending out, and the significance of a safe place and vulnerable adults.

As a discerning community, the team continued to move toward deeper understanding of the concepts, metaphors, and practices of hospitality. Individuals had provided some of these insights; others emerged from communal discussions. Although I had provided significant teaching time in the sessions thus far, many of these understandings of hospitality had emerged from the team's rigorous application of the intervention's vocabulary and hermeneutic to the selected texts. Corporately, the team had begun to sympathetically imagine the perspectives of the children in its care in more perceptive ways than before, even though they had long been intelligently engaged in their work.

Session 5

Session 5 pursued the primary objective of understanding the outsider. The group dwelt in the word together at Luke 8:26-39, the Gerasene demoniac. This is another episode of inhospitality in the ministry of Jesus; the team carefully used its interpretive tools to find the ways that the Gerasene community failed to offer either the demoniac or Jesus hospitality. The team also discovered a particularly inhospitable habit of the Gerasene community: that of sending away those they fear without any provision or protection.

After this discussion, we entered the next phase of the session. Instead of asking the team to read and interpret a biblical text, I presented an episode of *Joan of Arcadia*¹⁴ and encouraged the team to read its situation and narrative using the interpretive tools at their disposal. My intention for this exercise was to help them make the jump of horizons from the biblical text to a contemporary situation. This particular episode tells the story of Joan, a teen sent by God to intervene in the life of an outcast young man who is feared by the entire high school community. In ways, the storyline uncannily echoes the narrative of the Gerasene demoniac.

The group was able to interpret the story so as to come to an understanding of the particular outsider in this story and to use the hermeneutic of hospitality to assess the nature of his relationships with other individuals and communities. We attempted to understand what causes groups to shut people out and, in turn, what causes people to shut themselves out from groups. We came to see that when people feel unsafe (especially those in the parenting role), they tend to choose safety, holiness, and truth as the reflexive default positions. Those choices are often a form of “excess piety,” shutting people, usually children, out. We noted that children sometimes behave dangerously (thus unsafely) in order to create a “wall” between themselves and an inhospitable community; they do this because they do not feel safe in the presence of such a community. This discussion led the team to choose later in the process to include an important line in the staying section of the covenant: “We will . . . remain with each other through consequences when unsafe/unwholesome decisions are made.”

¹⁴ “The Uncertainty Principle,” episode 11 (originally aired 12/12/2003), disk 3, *Joan of Arcadia: The First Season*, DVD (Hollywood, CA: Paramount, 2003). This television episode gave the team’s visual learners an enjoyable experience and a more level playing field.

The team discussed the difference between being a community that lets people loose and a community that sends people out with blessing, providence, and direction. We agreed on the difficulty of assessing the motives of others. Thus in the covenant the community later wrote in the “staying” section, “We will . . . focus on behaviors rather than motives, extending to others the benefit of the doubt when motives are unclear.” We also agreed that, in cases where we do not understand the motives of others, the most hospitable strategy is to impute to them the best possible motive. This imputation will not always cause us to discern the truth, but it will empower us to behave hopefully. At the end of our meeting, we again spent some time discussing these and other insights from the session for potential inclusion in the covenant. The scribe made notes for future use.

Session 6

The primary mission of session 6 was to demonstrate the applicability of the concepts of hospitality to ministry with at-risk children. We dwelt together in the word at Genesis 21:8-21, the story of Hagar and Ishmael. The question for thought during the reading was “How does this text convert us in our personal and corporate lives?” Some participants viewed the text through Ishmael’s eyes, empathizing with his predicament. Others heard the cry of Hagar and imagined that her pain was like the pain of many mothers of young men with whom we deal every day. A couple of thoughtful but brave participants understood themselves to be like Abraham and Sarah, who had sent young men away from providence and protection in order to keep other children safe. The group found the long-term effects of those kinds of decisions to be very sobering. As we moved toward teaching time, I asked the team to be aware of the perspective through which they see the event and to be aware of the perspective of others looking at the event also. I

encouraged them to empathetically imagine, for example, that some of the parents of our boys would see themselves in this story as Abraham or Sarah. I proposed that we could see this story from the perspective of God; not that we considered ourselves to be God, but that we hear and respond as God heard and responded. A house parent countered, “Another way to see ourselves in the story is as the well.” I noted that this metaphorical view demonstrates that “we have a place, a purpose, and something to provide, which means that we need to understand that the day is going to come when someone is going to leave the well. We’re not life itself.” At the end of this transition, I helped them understand that any forced departure from a home potentially inflicts trauma. This discussion would later fund the portions of the covenant that spoke about welcoming parents when they bring their boys to Westview.

I then asked Shiann Metheny to take over the teaching time for the day. She had prepared a twenty-minute presentation about traumatization of children. Metheny defined trauma and then systematically demonstrated how the symptoms of trauma emerge in so many aspects of human life. She cautioned us to be aware that sometimes the symptoms of trauma are difficult to distinguish from some attachment disorders and ADHD, both in its hyperactive and inattentive types. She encouraged us to be especially alert to note any triggers that might stimulate symptoms of PTSD. At the end of her teaching time, we discussed ways that perceived safety and vulnerability provide the necessary environment for traumatized youth to find healing. We connected such an environment to our environment of hospitality.

After teaching time, we spent time working on the covenant. Specifically, we began brainstorming about possible rubrics we could use to organize the covenant. After

considerable discussion and several proposals, one house parent suggested that we consider framing the covenant based on the three basic moves of hospitality: entering, staying, and sending out.¹⁵ Over the next few minutes, interest seemed to coalesce around this idea. I checked the team for consensus and then suggested that we divide ourselves into teams, each of which would compose a part of the document related to one of these three hospitable moves. Each team would bring its proposed section of the covenant to the next session for discussion by the entire group. The team emailed me with their team preferences later that day, and I assigned people to be organizers so as to schedule team meetings. I empowered the teams to choose their own leadership once they met together.

Session 7

The primary objective of session 7 was to connect the developed theology to specific ministry practices, especially in the covenant. The dwelling in the word time for the day was spent in Luke 9:10-17, the narrative describing the feeding of the five thousand by Jesus. The question for consideration while reading the text was “How does this text prepare us for the coming reign of God?” As had been the case for several weeks now, discussion of the text was vigorous and insightful.

We passed out draft copies of the three sections of the covenant as written by the three separate teams over the last week. After some discussion, the consensus of the team was that significant editing of the texts was required. Since this might have been unwieldy with fourteen people in the room, we once again divided into three groups. These groups were mixed. There was at least one member from the original composing team working with new team members who had worked on another segment of the

¹⁵ See pp. 26, 51-52, 54.

covenant, but who were interested in this segment as well. Over the next forty-five minutes, the teams worked together to refine their part of the document. I moved from group to group to help facilitate the process. At the end, the team met to review their work for the day. The group decided that they were ready to send the document on to the scribe and the editor for the preparation of the final document. Drafts of that document were emailed to all team members over the next week to give them the opportunity to participate in the editing process. The team also discussed their responsibilities for the worship that was to take place the following week to celebrate the covenant.

Throughout this project, maintaining the appropriate level of involvement as a leader was my ongoing concern and challenge. This was particularly difficult during the writing of the covenant. The difference between leading and dictating can be as simple as the difference between “Should we?” and “We should!” To cohere with the theology of this project and to achieve a properly functioning covenant, it was imperative that the community write this document. If I were to have forced the covenant to meet certain standards, then I might have compromised the effectiveness of the project in the view of the insiders and invalidated an appropriate qualitative evaluation of the project. Consequently, I did not serve on any of the committees writing any of the covenant sections, although I did listen to parts of those conversations. As the leader of the community, my involvement during this phase took the form of questions: “How can we make this document flexible enough to deal with an unknown future?” “How are we going to interpret situations that this covenant does not cover?” “How can we use language that we have learned together during this project?” I also asked the scribe and editor to use active instead of passive language so as to clarify subject and object.

Session 8

Session 8 had as its primary objective the ratification of the covenant. The team practiced dwelling in the word at Luke 22:7-23, the Lord's Supper. While the team heard the text, I asked them to seek answers to the question "What do I hear about the hospitality of God?"

Afterwards, I asked the scribe to pass out the completed covenant among its members (all of them had received final copies by email). I asked the team to talk about the covenant as it has been written and their hopes and concerns about it. I polled the team one by one for consensus. When all team members had agreed to the covenant, we passed a copy for all to sign. I then asked the planners of the worship to enact their plan. The worship plan followed the shape of hospitality: gathering together, dwelling in the word, and sending out. After the worship, I thanked the team for their contribution of time, thought, insight, and experience to the project.

Evaluation of the Intervention through Field Notes

The discernment team participated in an extraordinary way in the project. Most of the house parents gave up at least one of their days off in order to be present. With fourteen team members, the lowest attendance at any meeting was ten. Yet beyond mere presence, this team sought to engage in hospitable conversations that empowered a fruitful discernment of theology and practice for its covenant of hospitality.

Evaluating the Hospitality of the Conversations

In a functional community, there is coherence between theology and practice. Consequently, if a community espouses hospitality as a theological priority, then one

would expect to find that community engaging in hospitable practice. The hospitality this work describes requires hospitality toward the ideas of individuals as well as their persons. Thus one would hope to experience equal opportunity and vigorous dialogue in the hospitable conversations of such a community. The dialogue of the discernment team during this project was certainly vigorous. Beginning with thirty-eight pieces of discussion in session 1, there was an average of over one hundred pieces of discussion per session by session 3, with my portion of that conversation as facilitator declining over time.¹⁶ There also appeared to be openness to the ideas of all participants, even though different individuals might opt to speak more or less. The field notes taken during the project make it possible to engage in an analysis that reveals whether the process and the community allowed those who were members of different demographic segments of the community an equal opportunity to participate in the dialogue. That analysis follows.

Table 1. Demographics of the discernment team

Gender		Age Groups		Highest Completed Level of Education	
Female	6	Twenties	4	High School Diploma	4
Male	7	Thirties	6	College Degree	5
		Forties	3	Graduate Degree	4

Table 1, “Demographics of the discernment team,” presents demographic data for the discernment team involved in this project. Since this team is white, middle-class American, there is insufficient differentiation in ethnicity to evaluate that factor. There is differentiation in gender, age groups, and education. The ministry team is relatively

¹⁶ Although the number of comments I made as a part of the total number of comments per session maintained a fairly constant percentage over the length of the project, the average length of my statements decreased over time.

young, yet moderately well-educated. Three out of the four individuals whose highest completed level of education is high school do have collegiate experience.

One way to evaluate the level of participation was to quantify the number of comments made by individuals who populated these various segments. The procedure for this evaluation follows. As a part of the field notes, I constructed conversation maps that noted the order and number of comments made by all participants. I then constructed tables comparing the participation of differing demographic segments (gender, age, and formal education) over the course of the project. I normalized the data so as to produce the average number of comments per individual representative of that particular demographic segment for each session.¹⁷ Because session 7 was a meeting in sub-teams to write the covenant and session 8 was a worship celebrating the completion of the covenant, these sessions were not part of the analysis. Since my participation in the role of team leader required more than the typical number of comments, I have excluded data about my participation from these demographic analyses.

Table 2. Comments per participant per session by gender

Session	1	2	3	4	5	6	Average
Female	2.3	1.8	5.8	7.0	6.7	3.8	4.6
Male	1.7	3.8	7.7	10	8.7	6.2	6.4
Ratio F/M	1.4	0.48	0.76	0.69	0.77	0.62	0.78

Table 2, “Comments per participant per session by gender,” shows that, although women began the conversation by speaking more often than men, the trend over all six

¹⁷ This was accomplished by counting the number of comments per person per session and sorting the persons into demographic groups. After calculating the total number of comments per demographic group per session, I would then divide the total by the number of individuals representing that demographic group actually present at the session. This process produces an average number of comments per individual present for a particular session by their particular demographic group.

sessions was for women to speak less often than men. The average ratio of female to male comments was 0.78/1. I observed no behavior during these sessions that seemed to exclude or limit the participation of women. Although men in this population have an advantage in graduate education (one woman has a graduate degree, whereas three men do), the percentage of college graduates is roughly equivalent (women – 75%, men – 71%). One may wonder whether previous suppression of the feminine perspective in other settings has caused this phenomenon. One might also ask whether these women have become sufficiently accustomed to their freedom to speak in community (whether a spiritual community or not) or if the community has adequately impressed them with the importance and uniqueness of their perspective in balancing the discernment process.

Table 3. Comments per participant per session by age group

Session	1	2	3	4	5	6	Average
Twenties	3.3	3.0	6.3	5.0	7.3	6.0	5.1
Thirties	1.7	2.8	6.3	6.8	8.0	4.5	5.0
Forties	1.0	2.7	6.0	10	8.6	5.7	5.7

Table 3, “Comments per participant per session by age group,” presents the normalized participation of team members in their twenties, thirties, and forties. The data show that this group permits, perhaps even encourages, the participation of those who are younger. One observation from these data is that, although team members in their forties were markedly reticent to participate in the first session, by later sessions they had begun to participate as fully as other age groups. In session 4 they tended to dominate the conversation for that one session.

Though it is not possible to know with any certainty, one possible explanation for these data is that older members of the team were somewhat reticent to experiment with a new process, although some had experienced various aspects of this process in other projects. The dwelling in the word segments of each session contained meditative components that may have been especially unfamiliar for some older participants. Once they became acquainted with the process, experienced in the practice of dwelling in the word, and felt their participation in the practice to be safe, they appear to have become more comfortable with unrestricted dialogue. These data also demonstrate the openness of the conversation to all and may also show the importance of felt safety even to those who are older members of the community.

Table 4. Comments per participant per session by education

Session	1	2	3	4	5	6	Average
High School Diploma	3.0	2.0	7.0	1.0	6.3	4.3	3.9
College Degree	1.6	4.3	6.6	10	11	5.8	6.5
Graduate Degree	1.5	2.3	7.0	8.3	8.7	5.0	5.4

Table 4, “Comments per participant per session by education,” shows the relative propensity of those with differing levels of education to speak. There are no linear trends present; at various sessions, differing groups tend to lead the conversation. Yet overall, those with college degrees tend to speak more than others, including those with graduate degrees. It may be that those with graduate degrees were more critically evaluating their responses before making them. Since no observable preference to education was shown in responses to ideas from differing groups, this trend may result from participants’ perceived need to contribute something to the conversation and not from their actual ability to contribute.

Overall, this community apparently seeks to practice conversation that is hospitable to all. Appropriate to its ministry to children, this group remains open to conversation with others, whether younger or older. This ministry team has moved to the place where such a practice is not a part of a daily checklist, but rather its hospitable conversations are one of the ways in which they habitually are community. The community has acquired certain other habits of practice, though, of which it needs to be aware. To privilege scholarship where it brings insight to the table seems appropriate, but only when it does not overbalance the experience of practitioners who may have fewer years of formal education. The community also must continue its efforts to remediate the imbalance of gender in its dialogue if it is to be truly hospitable.

An Overall Evaluation of Project Effectiveness

The project helped affirm and strengthen the ministry team's ability to function as a hospitable community in its openness to new ideas and perspectives, especially as evidenced during the dwelling in the word time of each segment. This project facilitated the creation of a covenant defining the practice of hospitality towards children. The ministry team was able communally to develop a theology of hospitality toward children for ministry at Westview, although the team's use of the theological vocabulary involved was not as precise as I would have liked. The covenant established principles and suggested practices that now define the standard for all Westview team members relative to their theology of hospitality. Since many in the community already had a desire for increased accountability, the process empowered the means for accountability provided by the covenant and an appropriate respect for it. Although it is too early to know if such changes are sustainable, there are already significant signs of improved quality of care for

children residing at Westview. Whether stress for ministry team members has diminished is less clear. The community's covenant provides a process of covenant education and acceptance for all new team members, but this has yet to be clearly formed or described. The team allowed for ongoing modification of the covenant; thus any deficiencies identified here, or yet to be discovered, can easily find remedy.

Interviews of Individual Participants

Within the week following the completion of the intervention, I conducted thirteen independent interviews with individual project participants. Just as all of the participants contributed meaningful content to the eight communal discernment sessions and to the writing of the covenant, so each participant brought unique insight into the evaluation of this process and its results.

The Questions

With an average interview time of a little more than nine minutes, the interviews allowed all of the project participants to respond fully to the planned interview questions. When the designed questions did not elicit complete responses, I redirected the interviewee with additional questions or prompts for additional information. Although I quote the language of particular team members in this section, it is fair to assert that one voice often speaks for a larger part of the team at Westview.

“Three Wishes” Question

The interviews began with a global question: “If God would grant you three wishes for the ministry at Westview, what would they be?” The intent of this question was to provide a seed thought that would stimulate the respondents to freely describe

their experiences of, and feelings about, the intervention. The question did not function as planned. The participants understood the question quite literally, and responded accordingly. As the interviews progressed, the lack of discussion about hospitality stimulated by this question was disconcerting. After the series of interviews moved forward, though, it became obvious from the responses to the other questions that every respondent took both hospitality and the project very seriously. Why then did the “three wishes from God” question not evoke dialogues about hospitality? As the analysis of data progressed, it appeared the project participants felt the responsibility to improve hospitality at Westview was in their hands, not God’s. The respondents were convicted that God wanted them to be a hospitable people. They also believed that God provided resources and relationships for such hospitality. The burden of action, though, was now with the community at Westview.

Their wishes did, though, address an appropriate environment for hospitality. Respondents said that they would ask for resources to empower the ongoing work at Westview. The request for resources ranged from “adequate” to “unlimited,” with one participant making a secondary request that having everything that we needed would not change who we were.¹⁸ Other participants would have asked God for additional houses in which to serve boys, new houses in improved locations to allow us to retire older houses and improve our costs of operation, additional team members to minister in those houses, and new programs to serve our residents. These requests connected with another wish:

¹⁸ Because of my reading of the community’s concern about this issue, I asked the team at a later post-project meeting to dwell with me in the word at 1 Kgs 17:1-16, the narrative of Elijah and the widow of Zarephath. We worked together as a community to understand “unlimited resources” in the kingdom of God is unlikely to require building bigger barns and more likely to mean never reaching the bottom of the jar.

more young men who needed the help of our community being able to find a way to Westview. Some of the resource requests were quite specific; two house parents wished a steady and affordable supply of fresh fruit and vegetables, which would allow the team to make healthy changes in the regular menus.

Some requests dealt with the Westview team. One participant wished God would help us be better stewards of the resources we have. Others asked for good health, reduced stress, personal growth, and a continually improving ability to work with one another.

A few participants would have asked God to remove obstacles from the path of their ministry. Some hoped for an abatement of struggles in the lives of their young charges that might make it more likely that these young men find a sustainable life. One respondent wished for relief from some state regulatory rules that he perceived to interfere with his ability to use best ministry practices.¹⁹ The most idealistic request was for the removal of church politics from the team's list of concerns.²⁰

“Changed Ministry to Our Boys” Question

The second question focused on the effects of the discernment process and covenant on the quality of care delivered to our residents: “How has discerning the covenant changed how you feel about your ministry to our boys?” Every participant except one described some way in which their ministry to Westview's residents had

¹⁹ His quibble was not with any regulations that require a high quality of care, but rather with rules intended to keep children safe that have a battery of unforeseen negative consequences.

²⁰ This concern stems from recent efforts by some supporting congregations to send questionnaires about specific doctrinal beliefs to Westview, each question of which presented “litmus tests” to determine if Westview is worthy of their support.

changed for the better.²¹ Typically, respondents described a shift in the value and weight of the ministry performed for the young men at Westview: “It has made me respect what we do, to hold it in higher value,” noted one team member. Another observed, “I’ve become more thoughtful . . . more aware of the ways that others think and feel and how my actions and words impact them.” For others, the use of hospitality as a rubric for ministry brought a shift from older paradigms: “This caused me to realize that the ministry is about hospitality, more than just correction.”

For several, the concept of hospitality now constantly engages them in questions seeking perspective: “Is there a better way to handle this?” “Is this going to do any harm to the boy, my family, the mission?” “Is this what God would want in the first place?”²² There was an awareness in participant responses revealing that they now viewed hospitality, their job, their boys, and the entries and exits of those young men “through a different set of lenses.” Some saw possibilities for hospitality within a developmental paradigm: “It’s not just taking care of kids. It’s raising them to be hospitable themselves, and to do that, we have to show hospitality. And things look a lot different from that perspective. I can see where that can be an effective way of raising children.”²³ Others understood the possibilities from a therapeutic perspective: “It’s actually given me better insight into relating to the boys and putting their stories into the stories we talked about [during dwelling in the word].”

²¹ Although one project participant claimed that the intervention had not changed her ministry to the boys, she immediately qualified that answer by adding that she did think that it was going to change how her family brought boys into their home and how they sent forth young men who have completed the program. Neither of those events happened in her home during the course of this intervention.

²² As seen earlier in this work, perspective questions for those in ministry are often theological question. See pp. 89-90.

²³ This connects with the concept of reciprocity in hospitality; see chapter 2, pp. 88-89.

The most common observation about how hospitality and the covenant might be changing the lives of boys at Westview related to the use of language. This perception included language spoken by the team members, the language of the boys as heard by the team, and the language shared among the boys. The language spoken by adults to young people, even in play, is critical. Although language among youth is playful, it is too often sarcastic. Team members emerging from this intervention had come to realize that it is important to retain playful conversation with young men, but to stop short of joining in on the meanness that can come from sarcasm. “It has made me more aware of how I talk to the boys,” noted one house parent. Another confessed, “It has been a reminder to me that I need to be more sensitive to the boys.” In some cases, the team has exercised amiable accountability: “We’ll say, ‘That’s not hospitable language,’ and we’ll laugh. We’re playing, but we’re reminding each other, too.”

Team members also reported being more sensitized to the language they hear. One house parent observed, “I pay more attention to the vocabulary that they use, especially if they use hospitality vocabulary, because that lets me know that they feel at home or that they don’t.” The language present or lacking is now providing clues to deeper issues for several team members: “What kind of needs are they expressing? . . . Deeper than just, ‘I need this.’ [Hospitality is] understanding that there’s more that they’re asking for sometimes than what’s on the surface.” Another house father recounted a descriptive example: “With one of our boys, he’s always asking to play video games, but he’s really not asking to play video games; he’s asking to spend time with me. And I understand it’s not the video games he wants, it’s the time spent together.” This sensitivity to hospitable language has brought more careful listening, but has also

encouraged setting appropriate boundaries. At dinner one evening, a houseparent redirected the inhospitable language of one of his young charges by telling him, “It’s okay to be upset about that situation, but that doesn’t mean you make fun of that person.”

Although these reports indicate an improved responsiveness to the clearly perceived and communicated needs of Westview’s residents, staff members relate their improved willingness to live in the ambiguity of other, less clear, situations. Pressing young members of the community too deeply about needs they are not yet prepared to express brings the possibility of inhospitality in the relentless quest for understanding. One participant describes a newfound approach to uncertainty, saying that the conversation about hospitality has “caused me to not always to look for an answer to why they’re feeling, to what they’re feeling. Sometimes I just have to be there, to comfort them when they come to me. . . . I don’t have to find out the reason why all the time. And that’s always something that I’ve struggled with in youth ministry.”

Team members reported heightened concern for safety as a result of the covenant. One team member evaluates a response to a situation with a simple question: “Is this making a safe environment or an unsafe environment?” Though parenting and house parenting require the connection of behavior and consequences within that environment, this need not be done inhospitably. “Even when it comes to consequences, we’re trying to think of ways that will still be hospitable in what we do. Even though we’ve got to teach them to do different things, make better choices. But do it in a way that they feel safe,” observes a house parent. For this ministry team, hospitality has come to mean safe haven. This is essential, explains one team member,

Because they come here scared, even though they may not show it. They come here defensive, and rightfully so. But to use words, language, and mannerisms

that show “You are welcome, you’re wanted, and you’re actually needed, and there is a purpose and a place for you here,” doing those things creates a safe haven for them to actually go through their stuff so they can get it out. It’s a safe enough place that no one here is going to run away from their anger, their frustrations, their hurts or pains. Actually we’ve opened it up for them so that they can go through that and get on the other side and know that there is safety and refuge here. This is a place of healing. You can only heal if you are welcome and safe.

Thus team members appear to have successfully appropriated language and behavior consistent with the theological and therapeutic commitments of this project.

“Westview a Better Place” Question

The third planned question was “In what ways do you think that the covenant can help our team make Westview a better place for all of us to live?” The responses of the participants identified a number of positives, including both the components and fruits of functioning as a hospitable community. First of these is the sense of belonging to, or ownership of, the community. One of the newest members of the team said, “Even though I have been working with Westview for a year and a half, I feel like I own a bit of what I’m doing now. It’s not like I’m doing what you gave me when I first took the job; I’m actually playing a part in something that I also had a part in creating.” Indeed, the recurring possessive pronoun “our” punctuated much of the individual responses during the course of the interviews. With that ownership, team members expressed a connected commitment. As one participant explained, “The core of it has to do with the fact that it is something we agreed to, and as a result it has more of an impact. We are agreeing to live a certain way, and we are agreeing to be accountable to each other.”

Since a relatively high commitment to community was already present at Westview, project participants honored such commitment while repeatedly stressing changes in the dimensions of their community initiated by their covenant. “One thing I

really like about it is that it is calling us to a higher level of community,” observed a participant. “There is a higher level; there is a deeper bond between the people in the community.” In other interviews, teammates echoed that language. One referred to the covenant as “a very high calling.” Another perceived that the covenant “brings us together on a deeper level so we will fight for each other.” At the same time, the feeling of that group of people remains communal, not corporate: “It makes [Westview] more like a family . . . , makes our boys feel like they’re more a part of a family than an institution, which has got to be more effective for them.”

Community members found improvements in specific areas; one such area was communication. Reflecting on the overall process, a participant observed, “Before we were slowly inching toward getting our plans together, working together, and communicating better with each other, but this has, in a way, slowly forced us to be with each other better. To communicate better. To work alongside each other better. And also to see each other’s gifts in a better way than we did before.” A peer connected this growth in communication with shared vocabulary: “Having a shared language, I don’t know if it’s proven growth, or it’s just exhibited it. There are already people that are using words differently.” Other team members believed that a common language would help “keep us on the same page.”

Deepening communal commitments and acquiring shared language have helped the community improve feelings of unity in the face of diversity. The team perceived this unity to have an important impact beyond the ministry team. “If the boys see us united as a community,” noted one participant, “then they’re going to feel safety in that.” At the same time, being “on the same page” does not require uniform, one-size-fits-all ministry.

A respondent explains, “We’re all individuals, and the way that I minister is not the way that Josh ministers. The way that I do it, or Misty does it is not the way that Angela, or Julia, or anybody else would. We’re all different.” That same respondent understood the power of that diversity, observing, “If one of us weren’t there, even the wording of this covenant would be drastically different. Because we all had a voice in what was said.”

Communities comfortable with diversity tend to encourage an appropriate vulnerability among their members. “We’ve learned to be vulnerable to each other,” claims one participant, who goes on to explain, “Being vulnerable with someone that you can trust is not so scary. . . . We know that everybody has weak spots, everybody is vulnerable. But everybody has strengths, and everybody has them in different areas, the same as weaknesses. So the more we know each other, the more we trust each other.” It would be good to temper this assertion with the view of other team members that, even in virtuous communities, vulnerability and transparency happen on different levels with different people. Nonetheless, vulnerability and openness remain important to other team members as well: “By being more and more transparent and open . . . , we become stronger in community.”

Transparency connects directly with accountability. The word accountability was one of the most commonly recurring terms in the post-project interviews. Although the team understands accountability to cover all relationships at Westview, a large part of that accountability extends to the standards of care for Westview residents: “We’re going to try to approach most situations the same way, with the same mind. So across campus, in the office, it’s going to be consistent,” said one house parent. He went on to

acknowledge that consistency²⁴ would require the team “to really hold each other accountable.” Such accountability is not always easy for the recipient, though one participant counters, “The good side of accountability is knowing that other people are looking out for you, even though it’s hard, especially if you do something bad.” Holding someone accountable is no more enjoyable than being held accountable, which causes some people to be reticent to actually follow through with accountability. A house mother anticipated the potential consequences of such a failure; she asserts that because the covenant “is a very high calling, . . . it can hurt if we don’t take it seriously and really . . . hold each other accountable to that, in a loving way.” In her view, both failure to hold a peer accountable and failure to be loving in holding a peer accountable are wrong.

In the participant interviews, team members often spoke directly of the covenant. Importantly, they did not perceive the covenant to be a directive from leadership or management, but an organic creation from within the community. One participant said, “The great thing about a covenant is that we wrote it in a way that we’re already trying to live, so that it’s almost a natural representation of who we’re trying to be. And so that makes it much easier.” The discernment group understands the organic character of the covenant continuing into the future, as they assert, “It’s able to grow with us. We wrote that if we need to change it, if we need to do things differently, we will.” In the view of most team members, the covenant describes a hospitality that is appropriate for all relationships within the community. “I was thinking of how we as a team interact,” recounted one participant, “and the covenant works for that as well. That it works for how we deal with the boys, and it works for how we deal with each other.” A peer agreed

²⁴ The Westview team would differentiate consistency from uniformity in that consistency requires following the same principles, whereas uniformity necessitates the same action.

about the covenant's potential, noting, "It has the potential to address not only the way that we deal with our boys, but the way that we deal with everybody with whom we come in contact, whether they be staff members, visitors, donors, whoever."

In their responses team members often touched on stress. When this happened, I probed for additional insight about whether the covenant would change the feelings of stress among staff members and, if so, whether stress would increase or decrease. The team had varying opinions about the effects of the covenant on stress. Some saw it as a function of time. "Starting off, it may be stressful," said a house parent, "but once we get it to become a practice and a habit, something we do every day, I think [the covenant] will relieve some of the stress." "It's going to be stressful to the point of bringing good change," observed one person, "good stress, bringing a positive outlook in the long run." Others believed that the reduction of stress was connected with commitment to the covenant: "For the most part, depending on how committed people are to it, it will reduce stress by changing people's behavior toward one another." But others may "feel more stressed to act in a certain way, so it may be a trade-off." Another team member agreed, "Hopefully, if we read the covenant like we tried to write it, then it will relieve stress. If we read the covenant like a bunch of rules, which is not what it is supposed to be, then our stress is going to go higher." One participant perceived the covenant to have changed stress levels in more complex ways: "In some ways it's increased, and in some ways it's decreased. There are some in the team who have seen in tangible ways that their voice can be heard, and that's reduced some of their feelings of stress. And there are some that we've called to be more team players that have increased their stress, because we're calling them not to separate so much."

A group of team members already feel that their stress level is shifting. “I feel like I’m not trying to be a fixer as much as I used to be, even six months ago,” confesses one participant. “But I feel like I’m not taking on as much stress as I was before, because I realized that I can’t do this by myself.” More confident about the project’s effect, another participant claimed, “I can definitely tell, even since we started your project, that my stress level has been less, and the way that I approach the boys has been different.”

As was anticipated in the early stages of the project, some found a connection between clear standards and reduced stress. One respondent observed the covenant reduces stress “I think, because it clarifies the expectations. I think it increases it on another level because the expectation is higher. Or may not be higher, but it is clearer. You can’t pretend that it’s not there.” A peer, not so quick to believe that the changes were so stressful, claimed, “I don’t know about being more stressed, I don’t feel like the expectations have been changed, I just think they have been more verbalized and concrete.” Other team members even perceived those expectations to be measurable.

Thoughts about the Process

The discernment process itself brought a variety of reactions. “It was hard. It was exhausting emotionally. I was excited to go to the meeting,” reported a house parent, “but after we were through with them, I felt like I was going to internally combust or something.” One of her peers experiencing a similar discomfort explained, “The process was painful, because for it to truly work, you have to break down some of your own barriers. So the process, I think, was very good because it made us face issues within ourselves, and as a community, that sometimes we don’t like to face.”

For others with differing personalities, the experience was different. Several team members said, “I really enjoyed the process.” More than one team member enjoyed the process so much they were not ready for it to end. “I wish it was longer. Eight weeks was great. I do feel like the last week of it was pressure-filled, trying to get it all written. In one way, I wish it was ten weeks, so that we had two weeks to write and think.”

Time spent dwelling in the word was particularly significant for team members. “I enjoyed going through the scriptures together, and hearing everybody’s ideas,” reported a participant, “That was fun.” Another explained, “I think it built a sense of team, especially by the way people were separated and regrouped differently every week. I think that was very critical to the success of the project in helping to see and understand each other better, as well as coming to understand hospitality better.” Some participants felt the process empowered a change of perspective: “I’ve never looked at those stories in that perspective. Now, I’ve looked at them as stories, but I’ve never broken them down and looked at why they were doing what they did, and the outcome of what they did. I think it’s good to learn from them again, and get a deeper value from them.”

Project Effectiveness from the Perspective of the Participants

The reflections of Westview team members in post-project interviews reveal that they believe this project has empowered them to create a covenant defining the practice of hospitality towards children. Their words lend credibility to the idea that this project has affirmed and strengthened the ministry team’s ability to function as a hospitable community. They have developed what they consider to be a communally developed theology of hospitality toward everyone connected with the ministry at Westview, but they tend to refer to that as “the covenant” and not as “theology.” They have produced a

written covenant, establishing the standards for all Westview team members relative to the covenant. Both the process and the document have engendered respect for accountability to the covenant and to the community. Such accountable behavior has already, in the team's opinion, resulted in an improved quality of care for children residing at Westview. Some have reported a diminished stress for ministry team members; for some this has yet to happen, at least in part because of the stress of change itself. The covenant speaks of a process of covenant education and acceptance for all new team members, but the community has not clearly defined that process yet. Fortunately, a feature of the covenant allows team members to call for ongoing modification of the covenant as experience in using it increases and as contextual factors change.

There are at least three possible distortions in the results from the individual participant interviews. First, the "placebo" effect makes it possible that the community's decision to undertake any project at all would bring positive responses. Second, in a close knit community such as Westview, peer pressure can affect how individuals respond to such interventions. Third, the awareness of my position as a leader with significant power in this organization may have caused participant evaluations to be more positive.²⁵

Evaluations by Independent Experts

Three independent experts evaluated the covenant in terms of the original aims of the project. The three experts were Dr. Holly Catterton Allen, Dr. Ralph Richardson, and Dr. Harold Shank.²⁶ Each delivered an overall evaluation of project success, a list of

²⁵ Often called the "Hawthorne Effect." F. J. Roethlisberger and W. J. Dickson, *Management and the Worker* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1939).

²⁶ A description of their expertise and current appointments has been presented on p. 142.

positive concepts within the covenant, and suggestions for the improvement or clarification of the covenant. In broad terms, all three believed the covenant to be useful for its intended purposes. All three also delivered useful critiques, giving the Westview team a substantial opportunity to improve the covenant, especially as it might be read and understood by outsiders who did not have the opportunity to participate in the process.²⁷ The following discussion will present an overview of their responses.

Evaluation of the Project

Allen noted the difficulty of understanding the true significance of the covenant without a “full understanding of the scope of the issues at Westview,” but believes “this covenant of hospitality will bless the community at Westview.” Richardson was deeply impressed “with the thought, the love, and the very evident compassion that has gone into developing this project.” Richardson also spoke directly of the covenant:

I began by reviewing the purposes you had stated and comparing them to the document developed by the team. Briefly, I certainly feel this document serves to affirm and strengthen the ministry team’s ability to function as a hospitable community. This is all the more the case because of the communal process used in developing the covenant itself. I also believe the written covenant does well in establishing standards for team members, engenders respect for accountability, and requires team members to call for an ongoing modification. All of these are addressed directly in the covenant.

Shank reports that, “given that those who do the welcoming did the creating of the document, I believe it reflects a careful intersection of theology and social work principles.” Such work, Shank finds, “is the foundation of effective Christian childcare.”

²⁷ Some of those critiques were quite detailed and are potentially very useful to the Westview team for consideration in future modifications of the covenant. A number of them are too detailed to relate here.

Positive Concepts

Two concepts in the covenant were particularly commendable to Allen: (1) “the admonition to walk with people through consequences” and (2) “the recognition that virtues often live in tension.” Shank lauded “the preparation of all involved before the arrival of the new person” as a way to get the entire community “on the same page.” Additionally, Shank noted, “The emphasis on an intentional welcome in the first hours gives a solid foundation for hospitality that can be meaningful and endure.” Richardson was pleased and intrigued with a number of ideas in the covenant: (1) “emphasis on welcoming families of new residents,” (2) “meeting the most urgent needs within 24 hours,” (3) “the importance of felt safety,” (4) “benefit of the doubt when motives are unclear,” (5) “making ourselves appropriately vulnerable to provide for the safety of others,” (6) “knowing our own culture,” (7) “a strong emphasis on relationship,” (8) “treat each member as an important part of the Body,” (9) “ask only what we are willing to do ourselves,” (10) “invite, continually, families of our resident to work with the team in the growth process,” (11) “allow others to help us carry our load when we are struggling and vice versa,” and (12) “a focus on how individuals leave the community as an aspect of hospitality.” Richardson emphasized particularly the significance of the last issue: “What is said and done when an individual leaves our community not only shows that individual how deeply they are valued by us, but also shows others the same. This is true regardless of the reasons for the person’s leaving.”

Areas for Improvement and Clarification

All three experts found significant issues worthy of critique within the covenant. None of these critiques renders the covenant valueless. Instead, a hospitable hearing of

these critiques gives the Westview team the opportunity to continue its ongoing process of shaping the covenant to better meet the community's needs.

There was some disagreement among the experts as to the extent of theological language in the covenant. Richardson and Shank detected theological language in the text; Allen did not find such language to be prominent. Yet none of the three thought that the document adequately made clear its theological connections and commitments.²⁸ Insiders were clearly aware of the biblical texts from which the covenant had emerged; these expert "outsiders" read the document without that very helpful information. All three suggested explicit connections with Scripture; Allen recommended placing theological language from this thesis in the preamble (or the beginning of each subsection) of the covenant so as to make that document's theological underpinnings clearer.

In terms of specific theological concerns, Shank noted two: (1) "theologically hope is attached to prayer which is not mentioned in this area of the document" and (2) "blessing was mentioned at the end, but not at the beginning. It may be that references to ritual reflect intent to bless." Both issues are worthy of discussion. First, in this work, hope is connected both with the kingdom of God in the present and the eschaton (see pp. 50-51). Although prayer is a spiritual practice that allows its practitioners to discover hope, it is not the only such practice: meditation on Scripture (Ps 119:43, 49, 81, 114; 130:5; Col 1:5), worship of God (Ps 42:5, 11; 43:5; 71:14; Acts 26:7; Eph 1:12), and acquiring theological insight and wisdom (Prov 24:14; Eph 1:18) are also connected with

²⁸ It might be helpful to note that I gave the discernment team three different sample covenants from Rendle's book to help shape their idea of covenant. One of these covenants referred to no Scripture, another mentioned one text, and the third mentioned several. Rendle, *Behavioral Covenants*, 122-26.

hope.²⁹ Since the virtue of hope stands in tension with truth, it seems logical that hope relates to practices that bring insight and understanding. Shank's association of prayer and hope, though, coheres with the use of prayer by Jones as a hope-building response to trauma.³⁰ Second, a greater emphasis on blessing as Shank recommends coheres with the theology developed in this thesis, which includes the connection of blessing and welcome (see pp. 109-111). Since, as Shank asserts, "many of these children have never received a blessing from God or another and it is almost impossible to function without it," then the idea of a daily blessing for children fits the biblical text and appropriate hospitable practice.

Allen sought clearer definition of terms and more direct connections between the purpose of the project and the covenant. She reasonably sought definition of some terms that are defined in this thesis, but that are not in the covenant. In addition, Allen observed: "I did not see a direct connection to . . . 'holiness over openness' or 'safety over vulnerability.' Probably because the team that developed the document understands these issues from the inside, they/you see closer connections. . . . Perhaps the document could be strengthened by making some of the direct connections." There are at least two reasons these connections are not clear. First, this is a communal document. Because I felt strongly that this document should be communal, I persistently resisted the inhospitable temptation to reshape everyone else's concepts and language to conform to my own. Undue influence over the outcome would have been unfair to the team because it would have subverted their work. Undue influence over the outcome would also have

²⁹ The community participated in all of these practices, including prayer, during this project.

³⁰ Jones, *Trauma and Grace*, 43-67.

been unfair to the research process because my awareness of the project's objectives (having written them) would have allowed me to meet or exceed those objectives handily without actually having accomplished anything with the community. Such a move would have rendered the project tautologous. Second, some of the vocabulary, especially theological vocabulary, of my work has become somewhat "blurred" within the community. Words I intended to have fairly focused meanings did not yet have that precision of meaning for all members of the team. Some team members used synonyms for key terms instead of the terms themselves, thus concealing connections from outsiders that might be obvious to insiders aware of communal semantic equivalents. Allen's critique, though, must be seriously considered in order to make the covenant comprehensible to new members of the community.

Richardson expressed concerns about the Westview team's ability to implement "two very positive statements" found in the covenant: (1) model healthy self-care physically, emotionally, spiritually, socially, and mentally, and (2) know your own culture and how it affects our responses to others. Richardson describes his concern:

Both of these involve a deep and honest introspection and understanding of ourselves. By definition, they involve us coming to understand how we often fail to see our own thoughts and actions and those of others as they truly are. And there's the problem—we see what we want to see, what we feel emotionally must be the case.

Richardson is correct; these issues are core problems in hermeneutics and therapy. The questions confronting the Westview team as a result are the following: "Will we approach situations with an epistemological humility?" "Will we use communal discernment as a practical tool to avoid cultural blind spots and minister cross-culturally?" "Will we allow the milieu of hospitality to create a place where those from poorly understood cultures can find safety long enough to give us the opportunity to

better understand their culture?” During the course of communal discernment, the Westview team considered each of these issues. What remains to be seen is how the community will enact its answers in the long term. Xenophobia is the instinctive move requiring no “deep and honest introspection”; godly hospitality will require courageous introspection and diligent interpretation of the current situation.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have presented the results of this intervention as viewed from a triangulation of perspectives: my field notes, interviews with individual participants, and evaluations by independent experts. All three perspectives point to the substantial accomplishment of the purposes of the project. Areas where there may be a lack of clarity or minor deficiencies have been identified and appear to be remediable by using provisions of the covenant that allow for its ongoing modification in the face of perceived need or changes in the environment. I will consider the significance of the positive outcome of this intervention in chapter 5.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS

Chapter 4 investigated the outcomes and effectiveness of the ministry intervention at Westview this thesis has described. That investigation required triangulation of three perspectives: my field notes, individual interviews of participants, and evaluations of independent experts. Based on the positive results revealed from these three vantage points, chapter 5 offers insights and conclusions about the significance of this project and its potential sustainability. The chapter also hypothesizes other possible applications for the process and theology developed in this work.

Impact on Participants

Those who minister at Westview find themselves facing a renewed calling. They understand that God called them here to minister to children. Now, through a covenant drawn up by their own hands, their peers call them into a commitment to be a part of a community of hospitality serving the needs of children in a radical way. Before this project the members of the community may have considered hospitality a useful communal practice; now they understand that hospitality is a way to be community. None of them are deceived into believing that they will find it easy to keep the covenant's high and challenging calling, but all of them are seeking to do their best as God empowers them to rise to the occasion.

The process itself appears to be part of the reason individuals choose to reengage this ministry. The opportunity to have voice and choice in a project fundamentally affecting the future of the ministry at Westview has been empowering for many members of the community. Such empowerment has brought an abiding sense of ownership and belonging that many have not previously experienced. A communal discernment process involving much time in serious study, meditation, conversation, and prayer has clearly revealed that ours is a very different kind of community from any of those with which they have ministered earlier in their career. Because the scriptural warrants for the community of hospitality are clear to them, they see this community as an attempt to enact the kingdom of God in a continually improving way. Such perceived differences have consequently deepened the attachment of ministry members to the community at Westview and to its unique way of being community.

Impact on My Personal Ministry

An experienced leader can readily understand leading a ministry team through such a communal discernment process is, by definition, a challenging act of hospitality. When a leader's evaluation, and perhaps his or her credibility, is based on the quality of project outcomes, the instinctive reactions of that leader are toward safety, holiness, and truth. It is a test of faith in one's community to be vulnerable and open enough to hope one can cast one's future into the hands of the community and live to tell about the experience. On the far side of this adventure, one thing is clear: the success of this intervention is the success of a virtuous community. The very nature of this community is now such that it requires a leadership that is aware that it functions as a virtuously hospitable community.

Part of the success of the project was due to the community's ability to believe with me that scholarship had something substantial to contribute to practice. The Westview community has chosen to be a learning community, a fact that has required it to trust that projects, experiments, and interventions would at least increase its knowledge and at best might change lives. Over the years our community has farmed for insight at the intersection of scholarship and praxis; it has been a fruitful endeavor for us. This project strongly affirmed my continuing efforts to connect the ministry at Westview with diverse disciplines of scholarship.

Impact on Westview Boys' Home

Over a period of years, the ministry team at Westview has become increasingly interested in its spiritual life, taken on a new communal character, sought new approaches to decision-making, and begun to reshape its ministry in keeping with the circumstances of new social, political, and ecclesial realities. The communal discernment project described and enacted by this thesis has brought together these various moves and demonstrated to each of its members the unique potential that God has assembled in this ministry team. They have come together to pursue the mission of God in this place. The completion of this project marks the beginning of a reinvigorated and radical practice of hospitality among a community of people who seek to praise God by serving children. This spiritual practice has already shaped habits that enact emerging virtues of a maturing communal character. The ability of the group to interpret its changing situation through the hermeneutic of hospitality is already working to keep the community centered in a path where it can serve children regardless of the changing landscape.

Being a hospitable community is, and will be, hard work. Caring for at-risk children always has been faith-testing, heart-breaking, gut-wrenching work. Instead of allowing members of the community to become callous to the daily drama of these young lives, this community has written a covenant calling itself to higher and more challenging forms of hospitality. These challenges can become either an impediment to the sustainability of this effort or stepping stones of completed challenges allowing them to move forward to address even greater challenges. While they understand the stresses and challenges the covenant and its enactment bring, the team believes this covenant will allow them to critique their own work, avoid much of the angst and grief that come from mediocre or poor performance, and powerfully and quickly reshape their own ministry so as to be more effective with the young people in their care. Their careful and informed attention to their own ministry has already begun to improve the quality of care for young men who reside at Westview. The extent to which they will be able to continue to make such improvements will become apparent only over a much longer period of time.

As they minister, all of the participants in this intervention now have a heightened awareness, rooted in Scripture, of this truth: they were never meant to walk and work alone. God has sent each of them to minister as a part of a truly hospitable community to bring others into a larger community: the kingdom of God. They are learning to rely upon God as the provider and protector of that community.

Considerations for Future Interventions

Some lessons were learned in the process of this project for which I was able to make adjustments during its implementation. First, a one-hour session was not adequate in length for the desired communal interaction; the participants quickly showed that they

would remain engaged enough in dialogue for a one and one half hour session. Second, I found that making copies of my field notes of a session available to those who had to miss a session helped keep those team members apprised of the progress of the dialogue.

Some opportunities for improving the project became fully apparent only in retrospect. More sessions would be appropriate for such an intervention. Another session that allowed for a discussion of epistemology as a component of the process of interpreting situations would have been useful. Additional structured time for the composition of the covenant would have also been helpful. Such time may be especially beneficial when participants are more gifted in oral communication than written. The use of a video proved to be remarkably effective in stimulating useful discussion. Other carefully chosen videos for other sessions might improve the engagement of the community in dealing with challenging material and in bridging the gap between interpreting texts and situations.

In facilitating these sessions, I made a deliberate choice to avoid handouts of the session material. This decision allowed team members to participate in discussions without the distraction of handouts and to make their own notes where they thought appropriate. I also hoped that minimizing written material would promote the generation of communal language instead of mere adoption of my language as the facilitator. One might assert that choosing more directive leadership and constructing handouts for participants might lead to clearer language in any documents resulting from such a dialogue. The use of graphic images to illustrate certain key concepts might also greatly assist visual learners.

As I noted in chapter 3, facilitators will face choices of what types of hospitable practices they wish the community to enact in engaging in a project such as that described in this thesis. I chose practices that tended to develop openness to conversation and receptivity to new ideas because of the particular needs of my community within its context and in its position in the course of its developmental process.¹ It is important to recognize that other communities will have different developmental needs as they move from their current positions with their unique strengths in order to attain a hospitality appropriate for their specific contexts and desired characters. Those needs may require such communities to engage in different kinds of hospitable practices during the course of their interventions from those used in this project. Oden sketches exercises that develop other useful practices of hospitality, including becoming attentive to hospitable opportunities, identifying the stranger, welcoming new experiences, and connecting kenotic practices to hospitality.² It is even possible that early in the intervention the community will discern those types of practices that they wish to learn or strengthen in later sessions of its intervention. In any case, as communities use such interventions to develop local theologies, they should also develop local practices and virtues consistent with their local theology and appropriate for their unique setting.

Such decisions must be made with an awareness of how sensitive communal discernment and any concomitant evaluative process are to a facilitator's leadership and choice of language, images, and practices. Based on the experience gained from this project, I assert that communities used to a communal discernment process are less likely

¹ A more complete discussion of my choice of practices is found on p. 131.

² Oden, *God's Welcome*, 53-100.

than others unused to such a process to be hypersensitive to leadership and abdicate decisions to their leader. It is also essential to remember that choices of theology and methodology actually engender a way of being community and do not merely produce practices independent of communal character.

Implications

The communal discernment team at Westview should seize the opportunity to improve the covenant for the understanding of outsiders, clarify theological content and connections, and broaden the listed examples of practice. The work of the outside experts in evaluating this document provides a very useful starting place for such an effort. The team should also begin the design of the covenant education process for future team members. Once this process is complete, the education of other staff members and volunteers provides an appropriate testing ground for the curriculum.

The Westview team is now positioned to pursue the development of specific hospitable environments for youth suffering with particular challenges or dysfunctions. Youth experiencing PTSD would be a potential target group. We have seen that hospitable environments are more comfortable for a young person with such issues; perhaps further refinements of that environment derived from evidence-based practices connected with that dysfunction could improve the success of such youth in Westview's programs.

Since the Westview team is already modeling hospitable practices to the young men in its care, the discernment team needs to consider how they might educate residents about the reasons hospitality is important to the Westview community. Is it possible that the young men living in one of the houses might work together voluntarily to create their

own covenant of hospitality? Or would some other approach be more suitable? The team is in a unique position to discern what they ought to do next. A team intended to pursue these questions has already received its charter.

Implications for Other Ministries

The success of the combined methodology and theology in this work lends credibility to the idea that one or both might be useful in other ministry applications as well. The theological work in this study (chapter 2) is portable to a broad range of contexts throughout the church and many parachurch ministries. Enacting this process in another context is more likely to be successful if the target group already has a substantial sense of community, is used to meeting together, and is able to have open conversations. It would be helpful for the group involved in the intervention to have some experience with communal discernment on a smaller scale. Such experience would imply that the community already functions with non-anxious leadership that is confident in team or communal approaches to ministry. Adaptations of this work in another context are more likely to be successful when the community values learning and growth. In fact, thorough enactment of this process requires that the community changes the way that it is community; how it reads situations, how it discerns responses, how it enacts its ministry, and how it holds its members accountable must all take on a coherent communal character. Finally, the facilitator of such a communal discernment process ought to have a thorough awareness of the theology of hospitality found in this work and an understanding of the ways such theology affects the way one must function as a group facilitator in order to honor theology and process.

Use of this process does not guarantee certain results. The use of the theological component without the concomitant methodological component risks incoherence between a substitute methodology and the theology of hospitality. This may compromise the quality of the expected outcome. Though useful as an example, the covenant of hospitality produced by Westview is not portable in any extent to another context. It is a carefully derived local theology applicable only in Westview's context. It is, as we have seen, only fully intelligible within its native community. A community choosing to use the theology and process of this study in the creation of uniquely hospitable processes and covenants for use in its own context is the appropriate use of this work.

Residential Child Care Facilities

The most obvious extension of this work would be its potential use at other residential child care facilities. The opportunities and problems they experience are quite similar, regardless of their size and geographical location. This is an intervention in which a smaller ministry team is not at a disadvantage. This process has produced a ministry environment similar to those created by proprietary programs that are very expensive to purchase and maintain, not often informed by the spiritual beliefs of their practitioners, and not usually contextualized as a local theology.

Children's Ministries and Youth Ministries

For the most part, congregations within the Churches of Christ (and in the broader Stone-Campbell Restoration Movement) do not have a complete theology of children and

most lack a practical theology of children.³ This thesis establishes the value of hospitality as a rubric for a practical theology of children. The implementation of such a theology requires that a church begins by changing the metaphors by which it describes its relationship with children.

There are a number of metaphorical images available in the biblical texts that describe the relationships between adults and children. As with metaphorical images of God, each metaphor brings its unique truth while remaining inadequate to express the completeness of the reality it describes. The image of parent has been useful as a metaphor of the adult-child relationship, but it is limited by these realities: not all adult-child relationships are parental, not all children have parents who enact these roles effectively, and not all children have parents. Many perceive the parental metaphors to be somewhat static; it seems intuitively obvious that the mother of a child always remains the mother of that child. Yet too often adults, particularly parents, resist the changing nature of their roles with children.

The image of hospitality successfully captures the transient nature of human relationships. It is particularly useful for adult-child relationships. Just as they do in the practice of hospitality, children enter, remain, and leave a place shared with other human beings, a home. They share resources and relationships. In the life of the church, children enter, remain, and leave a Christian community. They share spiritual resources and relationships. One operating within the metaphor of hospitality recognizes that reality

³ Ron Bruner, "Children and the Kingdom: A History of Children and the Churches of Christ," *RQ* 47.3 (2005): 143-60. Houston Heflin has written a theology of youth ministry focusing on the role of the minister. *Youth Pastor: The Theology and Practice of Youth Ministry* (Louisville: Abingdon, 2009).

from the beginning of the relationship: the day is coming when there will be a sending forth into the world and onto the next destination.

This may very well describe the relationship of the church with children who grow up in its midst, but what about outsiders? As Wally Wilkerson reflected on the early days of youth ministry in Churches of Christ, he lamented the tendency of some elders to guard the flock instead of seeking the sheep.⁴ Some church leaders still have the same reflexive response to young outsiders from unfamiliar cultures. Indeed, current theoreticians and practitioners of youth ministry are currently struggling with concepts that allow them to minister to the ever fragmenting and flexible microcultures prevalent among youth today.⁵ As one group of youth ministers in California sat and discussed the possibilities, John Wilson described his youth ministry utopia:

I want to describe what I'm seeing in the future. I want our youth ministry to be safe for everyone and acknowledge all of these tribes' uniquenesses and value and styles. I want them to move into and through a great place of multiculturalism, based on respect, humility, and valuing each other. But, ultimately, I dream of a day when we can move beyond a multicultural youth group to a kingdom-culture youth group. I want our youth group to feel like heaven.⁶

This youth minister speaks of communal virtues that seem congruent with the character of the community of hospitality described in this thesis. Instead of enabling the church to fear cultural differences between insiders and outsiders, the practice of hospitality encourages the community to expect cultural difference, engages the community in

⁴ Ron Bruner, "Practical Ministry to Youth in Churches of Christ" (paper presented at the Christian Scholars' Conference, Nashville, TN, June 26, 2009), 8. Wilkerson was one of the first generation of youth ministers in the Churches of Christ and a mentor to many youth ministers.

⁵ These groups are commonly referred to as tribes. For a description of tribes in a broader sense, see Seth Godin, *Tribes: We Need You to Lead Us* (New York: Penguin, 2008).

⁶ John Wilson, quoted by Mark Oestreicher, *Youth Ministry 3.0: A Manifesto of Where We've Been, Where We Are, and Where We Need to Go* (El Cajon, CA: Youth Specialties, 2008), 92.

positive conversations with those who are different, equips the community to respond constructively to their shared experience, and empowers them to maintain their holy identity in the midst of their diversity and openness.

The concept of the hospitable community has the potential to nurture and attract children and youth. It might also provide a community in which children's and youth ministers could safely engage parents and church leadership, while giving all of these important constituencies voice and choice in ministry with their children. Both children's and youth ministries are best served by communities and led by teams. Houston Heflin, for example, proposes ten youth ministry roles that must be enacted in order to have a fully viable youth ministry.⁷ Since it would be a rare human indeed who could actualize all ten of Heflin's ministry roles singlehandedly, a better approach is to share those roles as a team or a community. I suggest that the hospitable community has the character and diversity ideally suited to enact those roles.

Missionary Teams and Missional Churches

Missiology and the missional church seem to be potential areas for application of the concept of the hospitable community. The community at Westview is, in many ways, a team of missionaries engaged in cross-cultural work in a land that, although not actually distant, seems very isolated some days. In the case of missionary communities, it would seem useful to communally discern a rule (or covenant) based on their local theology. Such a document would enable them to regulate interior relationships and empower

⁷ Heflin, *Youth Pastor*, 13. Those roles are given in dyads: evangelistic missionary—discipling teacher; pastoral shepherd—organized administrator; bold prophet—compassionate priest; spiritual friend—equipping recruiter; visionary leader—faithful teammate. I agree with Heflin about the necessity of all of these roles and find his organization of these roles in dyads to be useful. The contrast in the character of the roles within the dyads makes apparent the difficulty for one person to function in all of those roles.

outsider relationships. The theology of this work is rooted, after all, in a primary missional text: Luke 10:1-12. As to the missional church, the community described by this intervention has a striking resemblance to that promulgated in missional literature: the “communities of the Holy Spirit” as described by Inagrace Dietterich, for one.⁸

Church Leadership

The theology and methodology of this intervention are well-suited to congregational leadership. The concept of the hospitable community is potentially useful to any size eldership. It also has potential for congregations who have a large ministry staff. This intervention was enacted with a ministry team similar in size and in complexity of ministry function to the ministry team of a very large congregation. Either an eldership or ministry staff would find enacting the principles of the hospitable community to allow them to maintain appropriate relationships and allocate resources (facilities, finances, and power) in a way that serves the entire church community.

Parachurch, Nonprofit, and Business Organizations

During the course of the project thesis defense, committee members suggested that this intervention had implications for settings beyond local congregations and residential child care facilities. Many parachurch and nonprofit organizations could successfully pursue their mission by shaping themselves into the hospitable community described herein. It should also be possible to construct completely philosophical underpinnings for this work that would be strong enough to sustain the use of these practices by for-profit businesses or business teams. In all of these cases, the communal

⁸ Dietterich, “Missional Community: Cultivating Communities of the Holy Spirit,” 142-82.

discernment of behavioral covenants holds the potential to increase focus on mission and reduce costly conflict in the work place. Such conflict can result in lost time, turnover, lost business relationships, and even litigation.⁹ A strong community with a strong sense of mission and identity entering into a behavioral covenant dealing with conflict at the lowest level avoids these weaknesses and builds organizational virtues in their place.

Ideas for Further Development

Several interesting projects could build upon the work in this thesis. First, how might we translate this work into the context of a children's ministry or a youth ministry at a local congregation? What other voices would need to enter the dialogue for such a move to happen? Second, how might we continue to improve the character of the hospitable community by shaping it into a seedbed for other Christian virtues? How do those virtues connect with those already at the core of this community?

Conclusion

Hospitality is more than a biblical theme. Hospitality is more than a pattern allowing contemporary churches to imitate first-century exemplars. Hospitality is a spiritual practice for individuals seeking to emulate Jesus. Hospitality is also a communal spiritual practice for communities attempting to enact the hospitable kingdom of God.

The essential claim of this thesis is that the community of hospitality is the community of God that has found its way into the very mission of God. That community calls others into the ever open welcome of God. That community abides as the safe house of relationship and reconciliation. That community sends messengers of hope to take the

⁹ Karl A. Slaikeu and Ralph H. Hasson, *Controlling the Costs of Conflict: How to Design a System for Your Organization* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1998), 3-19.

news to outsiders that the kingdom of God is now and not yet. Who better for that community to welcome than children? With whom better to abide than children as they learn to abide with God? Who better to send forth into the world than those to whom God has next given it? The essential hope of this thesis is that God will help us learn how to be that community for the sake of our children and their children as well.

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APPENDIX A

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Title of Project: Communally Discerning a Covenant of Hospitality for the Care of Children at Westview Boys' Home

Principal Investigator: Ron Bruner – Abilene Christian University, Abilene, TX

Advisors: Dr. Jeff Childers and Dr. Stephen Johnson

Introduction: I understand that I have been asked to participate in a small group of participants from Westview Boys' Home.

Purpose: This project will facilitate the creation of a covenant defining the practice of hospitality towards children. Thus, ideally this project should: affirm and strengthen the ministry team's ability to function as a hospitable community, communally develop a theology of hospitality toward children for ministry at Westview, and produce a written covenant which establishes the standards for all Westview team members relative to that theology.

Procedures: This project will enlist 12 to 14 volunteers from the Westview ministry team. The project will entail eight one hour sessions, conducted between September 8 and October 29. Upon signing this document, you understand that your opinions and experiences may be incorporated into this thesis.

Potential Risks: There are no identifiable risks to participants in this research study. All published participant quotations will remain anonymous.

Potential Benefits: Through participation in this project, I hope that the Westview ministry team will better serve the children in its care, and that individual participants will learn how to better practice a particular form of Christian hospitality that this community agrees to extend to others.

Compensation: There is no compensation for your participation in this research.

Rights of Research Participants: I have read the above. Mr. Bruner has explained the nature of the group and has answered my questions. He has informed me of the potential risks and benefits of participating in this research.

I understand that I do not have to participate in this research, and can withdraw from this research project at any time.

I understand that all of the information I provide will remain confidential.

If I have any questions or concerns, I can contact Mr. Bruner by telephone at (580) 688-9281, or by email at wbhdir@aol.com.

Signature of Participant _____ Date _____

Signature of Principal Investigator _____

APPENDIX B

FIGURES

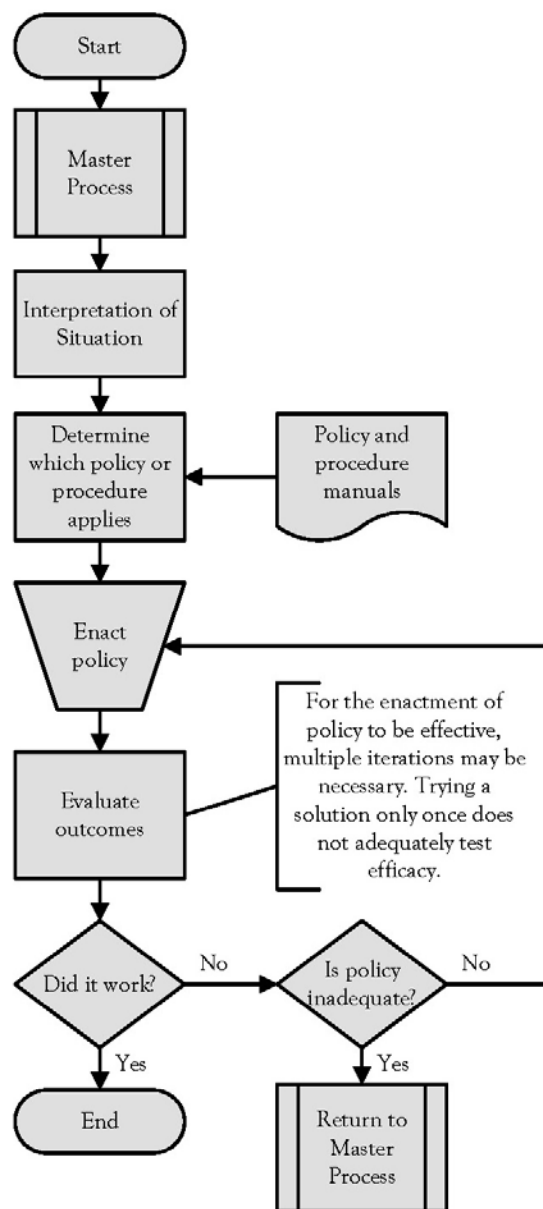


Figure 3. Flowchart of the policy and procedure process.

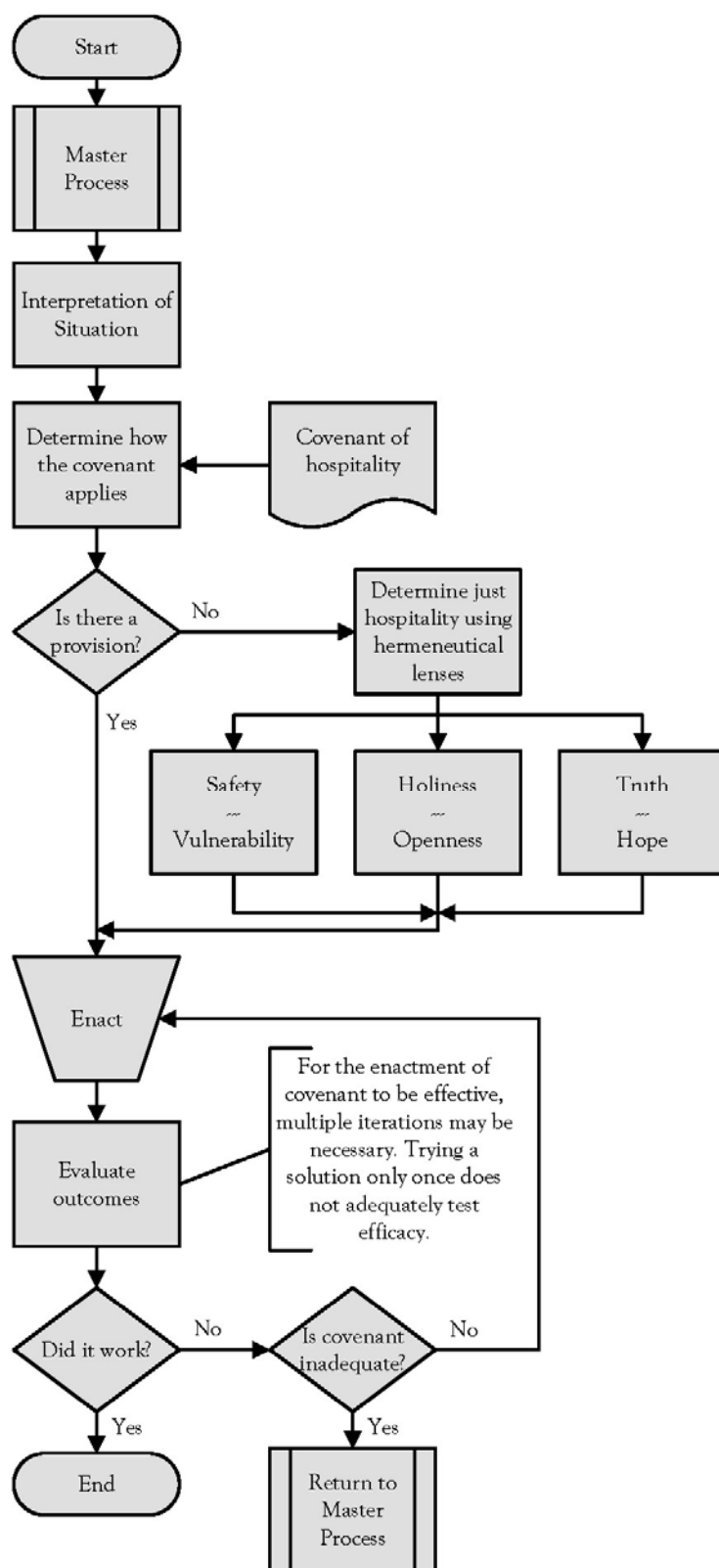


Figure 4. Flowchart of the process of using covenant.

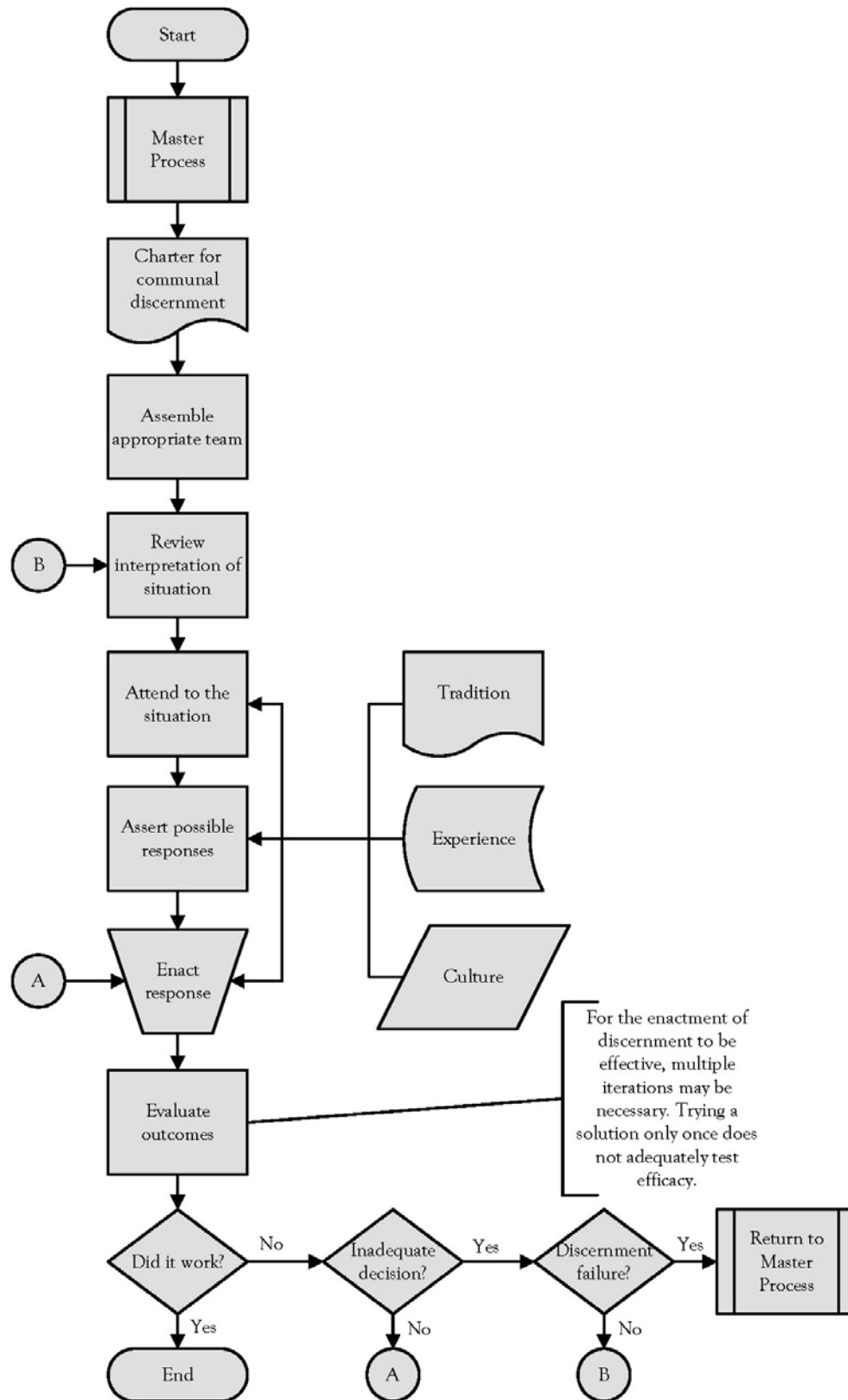


Figure 5. Flowchart of the communal discernment process.

APPENDIX C

OUR COVENANT OF HOSPITALITY AT WESTVIEW BOYS' HOME

Preamble

All members of the Westview Boys' Home Treatment Team agree upon this Covenant, with all stating that they have had a voice in its creation. Before God, all team members agree to this Covenant as the standard by which we will live as a Community, "Community" meaning: all those who enter into ministry and/or residency at Westview Boys' Home. This includes all staff, residents, guests, children of house parents and volunteers. Though each Community member's role in offering hospitality will differ, each will offer it to his or her capacity. We intend this document to express our commitment to hospitality.

It is inevitable that the Community will change in its membership over time. As new members of the Community are added, they will be asked to abide by this Covenant of Hospitality. Over time, it is also inevitable that this document and its implementation will require modification. When the Community deems that modification of the Covenant should occur, it will be so. The Community will modify the Covenant in a way that accurately addresses the needs of the Community at that time.

The following principles are further illustrated by the practices listed below. The practices do not fully express the principles listed, but are representative. The practices put forth are examples of the minimum standards we covenant to enact. We will abide by these practices together with the awareness that all of us started our time with the Community as outsiders.

Principles and Practices of Welcoming into the Community

- As Christ invites us, we will invite people into the Community in the following ways:
 - Prepare the Team for the potential entrance of a new resident; the Admissions Team will brief the Treatment Team each potential resident and together make a group decision as to where he will be placed.
 - Prepare the current Community members for the entrance of new Community members; Treatment Team members will share information which will allow the current Community to feel safe about the entrance of new members.
 - Introduce new Community members to all staff members, allowing new Community members to learn the different roles of those at the Home.
 - Set boundaries to balance the safety of the current Community members with the needs and gifts of potential Community members.
- Just as the Family of God is encouraged to draw new members into the Kingdom, we will act in the following ways to draw new members deeper into the Community:
 - Welcome the families of new residents, inviting them to deliver new residents to the house, to help unload, and to see his new space.

- Mentor the new resident as he learns the Behavioral Management Program.
- Set a time for a houseparent/resident-led orientation, to encourage clarification of the Behavioral Management Program.
- Meet, or have a plan to meet, the new Community member's most urgent needs within 24 hours, in order to exhibit our welcome in a tangible way.
- Welcome new Community members with a ritual that will speak to the heart of said members.
- Welcome new Community members with a communal time, which will allow all involved to become acquainted.
- Integration into the Community will be expedited in the following ways:
 - Continue to express welcome to new Community members with one or more rituals that will speak to the heart of said members.
 - Orient the new Community member to church structures and activities, giving said member opportunities to meet other members. Other Community members will be encouraged to have a large role in this orientation.
 - Engage the greater church community in welcome and integration.

Principles and Practices of Staying at the Home with the Community

- The principle of felt safety is vital to the health of the Community and individual. To achieve this we will:
 - Use language that engenders safety for all members of the Community.
 - Focus on behaviors rather than motives, extending to others the benefit of the doubt when motives are unclear.
 - Move proactively to preserve safety and peace.
 - Allow room for God to work rather than reacting impulsively.
 - Learn the culture of others and respond empathetically to their worldview.
 - Make ourselves appropriately vulnerable to provide for the safety of others.
 - Build a culture in the Home that is universally welcoming.
 - Know our own culture and how it affects our responses to others.
- Hope is essential to growth. To promote hope we will:
 - Look for and encourage the best in others and ourselves.
 - Encourage others to look for the best in each other.
 - Utilize ceremony, ritual and routine to engender safety and promote growth.
 - Provide hope for our boys and their families through praise for success, constructive guidance and exemplifying God's grace.
 - Remain with each other through consequences when unsafe/unwholesome decisions are made.
- Relationship is at the core of who we are as Christian brothers and sisters. To build teamwork, we will:
 - Treat each member of the Community as an important part of the Body.
 - Ask of others only what we are willing to do ourselves.

- Acknowledge that God is constantly present and the Head of our Community.
- Communicate clearly as a matter of respect to Team members.
- Live lives of holiness communally and individually.
- Set boundaries lovingly, clearly and firmly.
- Invite, continually, the families of our residents to work with our Team in the growth process.
- Allow others to help us carry our load when we are struggling and vice versa.
- Rejoice when others rejoice, weep when others weep and hold each other accountable as members of the greater Kingdom.
- We understand that our habits and behavior influence the behavior of others. Therefore, we will model:
 - Christ in even the most basic of tasks.
 - A positive and balanced work/play ethic.
 - Flexibility and good priority-setting.
 - Healthy self-care physically, emotionally, spiritually, socially and mentally.
 - Respect of God, Others, Self, Nature and Property.
- Providing a place of physical comfort is essential to emotional and physical safety. Therefore, we will:
 - Include our Community members in changes so that they are allowed to have ownership of their physical space.
 - Maintain a clean environment as a working Community.
 - Meet the physical needs of others while also addressing their emotional, social and psychological needs.

Principles and Practices of Sending out from the Community

- Everyone who enters this Community must eventually leave. The ritual of the sending out from the Community is for the benefit not only of the one leaving, but also those physically remaining.
- We will be a people committed to sending those who leave, regardless of how they leave, by doing the following things:
 - Equip them with sustainable relationships, knowing they have a Community that will love and support them when they need assistance in life.
 - Send them out with resources, commensurate with the time spent within the Community, whether those resources are material, spiritual, and/or physical.
 - Give them a blessing of Hope and Peace.
 - Entrust their lives into the hands of God through the prayer and petition of the remaining Community.

Though we have made an attempt to be inclusive in the construction of this Covenant, there are situations not addressed. The virtues utilized as a foundation in building this

Covenant are the same ones to take into consideration when such is the case. These virtues that live in tension are: holiness/openness, hope/truth and safety/vulnerability.

Celebrated and Implemented 11/5/2009

BRIEF VITA

Ron Bruner was born in Chickasha, Oklahoma, on August 3, 1954. He attended public schools in Duncan, Oklahoma, and graduated from Duncan High School in 1972. He enrolled in Oklahoma Christian College that following fall and graduated with a bachelor of science degree in business administration. Bruner married Ann Fairbanks of Ardmore, Oklahoma, in August, 1977. Together, they have three children: Ben (1979), Lauren (1983), and Bailey (1989). Bruner pursued a business career from 1977 until 1994. That year he began serving as the youth and family minister at the Eastside Church of Christ in Duncan, Oklahoma. He moved to Hollis, Oklahoma, in October of 1999 to take the position of executive director of Westview Boys' Home. Bruner completed his master of arts in ministry with a family life emphasis from Oklahoma Christian in 2002. From 2002 until 2007, Bruner studied toward the MDiv equivalency at Abilene Christian University. Bruner entered the DMin program at Abilene Christian in June of 2007.