

radical

*hospitality*



— NEW & EXPANDED EDITION —

radical  
*hospitality*™  
benedict's way of love

LONNI COLLINS PRATT WITH FATHER DANIEL HOMAN, OSB



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*Radical Hospitality: Benedict's Way of Love*

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“All guests who present themselves are to be welcomed as Christ, for he himself will say: ‘I was a stranger and you welcomed me.’”

—*The Rule of St. Benedict* 53:1

“Once a guest has been announced, the superior and the community are to meet the guest with all the courtesy of love.”

—*The Rule of St. Benedict* 53:3

“Great care and concern are to be shown in receiving poor people and pilgrims, because in them more particularly Christ is received.”

—*The Rule of St. Benedict* 53:15

“Let us open our eyes to the deifying light, let us hear with attentive ears the warning which the divine voice cries daily to us, ‘Today if you hear his voice, harden not your hearts.’”

—*The Rule of St. Benedict*, Prologue 29



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# New Introduction

“If we take seriously the call to radical hospitality, we will discover the true meaning of ministry,” the pastor said to his congregation. It was Sunday morning in Dayton. “The birth of the radical hospitality movement in our congregation can be traced to one guy reading a book a few years ago. This isn’t some new spiritual fad, though. We have been awakened to our indifference by the Holy Spirit, and in the process of learning to welcome and care for those who are unlike us, we are on the gospel road. I know, I know, it sounds like a song our grandparents might have sung at camp-meeting doesn’t it?”

Hospitality is at the heart of Christianity. No one has ever been more radically welcoming than Jesus, who was always accused of associating with the wrong kind of people—people we wouldn’t want in our living rooms, or next to us worshipping.

The phrase *radical hospitality* refers to the activities and desires that inspire individuals and communities to welcome those who are unlike themselves. Rather than viewing any person in terms of how they benefit us, radical hospitality means accepting the person with no thought of personal benefit. Instead of seeking persons who will support the congregation, actively seek persons who need the support of the congregation. To become hospitable means finding ways to welcome the marginalized, forgotten, and misunderstood among us.

Our world feels no safer than it did when the first edition of this book, *Radical Hospitality*, was originally published. Back then, we were still staggering after September 11, 2001. The falling towers were still in our minds. Fear and an awareness of our vulnerability had taken up residence.

In addition to our fears, we have become a culture with more disdain and indifference than before. Today, human kindness often seems under siege. In the midst of this, some of us are looking for ways to grow more hospitable. Regardless of where our search may take us, it must begin, for all, with a turning inside and ruthless self-evaluation. An examination of conscience that

scorches away the excuses we grant ourselves is not just needed; our lives and our society may depend upon it.

For example, it is our nature to seek out persons who are like us for mutual support and affirmation. And it is typical of religious groups to reach out to persons who have something to bring to their congregation, a contribution to make. Most often when you join a church you're asked to pledge your abilities, time, and resources to support the faith community. As a church, we have become accustomed to viewing our membership in terms of what others can give the local congregation. We actively seek out productive, contributing members of our community.

But radical hospitality calls us to search for the lost ones, those who have nothing to give us, but who, instead, need something from us. They may or may not be aware of what they have to give in return. Radical hospitality does not keep a ledger of what is given and what is received.

Certainly there are faith communities that are better at radical hospitality than most. In Detroit, Cass Community United Methodist Church is just such an example. The Reverend Faith Fowler is the pastor, and she has brought a new day to this battered place.

Having grown up in the Detroit area, I have long heard stories of the Cass Corridor, one of the nation's most impoverished regions. Cass Avenue is where Faith and her congregation are located. Think of the toughest inner-city district you know. Home to drug-dealing, crime, and prostitution. A place where the homeless are propped against walls of vacant buildings after they've been brutally beaten and robbed of half a bottle of cheap wine. A dumping ground for those with addictions and mental illness. A place avoided by nice church people. Faith and her congregation call that place home.

A few years ago, Faith came to Heritage United Methodist Church, the congregation where my husband, David, is pastor, in rural Michigan. The two churches are as different as two congregations can be. Faith told us stories from her life. She's been robbed so many times she's lost count. Our church has been broken into, but the culprits used oversized cabbages to break a window—there were no guns or knives. We have a few families who have members with special needs. Faith's entire congregation would be labeled "special needs" by our group.

When Faith spoke of what they are doing in Detroit to strengthen and grow a community of faith that will

support and serve the needs of those who live in and around the Cass Corridor, she never mentioned the phrase *radical hospitality*—but Faith has lived it and she has led the people she serves into the very depths of radical hospitality. The Cass Community Church is bringing hope to a place where once the warning, “Abandon hope all ye who enter here,” was fitting.

Of course, most of us don’t live in places like Detroit’s Cass Corridor. The outcasts among us are not quite so obvious.

Not too long ago, I was watching an episode of the *Andy Griffith Show* with my granddaughter Gina. Gina is thirteen and she adores Mayberry. She is not old enough to have seen the original classic television show starring Andy Griffith as the wise and cheerful sheriff of a little southern town named Mayberry, but the show exists in reruns and on DVDs. Gina has enthusiastically discovered both.

The particular episode we happened to watch together was about Sheriff Andy, Deputy Barney, and a troop of boys going into the woods on a rustic camping trip. Barney is, of course, making a lot of noise about how he knows the wilderness, can live off the land, and never gets lost, blah, blah, blah. Predictably,

Barney and some of the boys, when they are off on their own, become lost.

The boys say, “Hey, Deputy Fife, we’ll be okay because you can catch our dinner and start a fire.” Barney would be challenged to start a fire with straw and matches. But, there he is, trapped in his big-man talk, about to look like a fool to a group of small boys. Except, he has one thing going for him—he has the best friend of all time—Andy.

When the little group doesn’t return, Andy goes searching and finds them, but doesn’t reveal himself right away. Remaining hidden, he figures out Barney has gotten himself into a heap of trouble, so while no one is looking, Sheriff Andy starts the cooking fire and places over it the roasted chicken Aunt Bea sent out for his dinner. Barney ends up a hero.

When the show finished, Gina looked at me, clearly baffled. She said, “The boys never know that Barney was bragging? That he didn’t know what he was talking about?”

I shook my head, “They never know.”

“It would be funny. He made a fool of himself. They could all laugh at him. They’d learn not to act that way.”

“Which, you know, is how it would go on the Disney channel,” I said. “It would be another chance to laugh at the little awkward guy who tries too hard.”

“It. Would. Be. Funny.” She replied slowly and clearly.

Don’t we all wish for a friend who will cover our self-delusional silliness? Sometimes it seems that we’ve moved so far from such an idea that the notion of a friend like Sheriff Andy is just . . . foreign. These days, we often pull away and let people sink. We call it tough love to leave people choking on their mistakes. Why do we do that?

How do you press against darkness? How do you remain or become an agent of change or transformation? Every now and then a good reason to strive for countercultural comes along—this is one of those times.

Radical hospitality must uncompromisingly remain fundamental to its revolutionary nature. This is not to say that the word *radical* necessarily means “extremist”—it doesn’t. *Radical* refers to what is fundamental, or the root of something. You may remember from high school science that the term

*radical* also describes an atom that doesn't lose its identity during change. Our identity as people of faith and communities of faith will be gained, not lost, in the changes required to become radically hospitable.

Hospitality that is radical is needed now more than ever before. This is obvious when you drive, shop, eat at a restaurant, or send a child to school. I've read reports of bus drivers yelling at their passengers because they're too slow getting seated or their toddler wets a seat. One day I sat in the office of the local middle school and heard a girl walk up behind a boy and say, "You're such a fag. Did they finally throw you out of school?" Maybe I see more of this disdain than a lot of other people do because I hang out in a middle school and with teens, but, an attitude of contempt is not limited to young people.

Jesus had a radical idea. He said love the ones who are hard to love, love your "enemy." I don't know about you, but I can't really think of anyone who qualifies as my enemy. However, this disdain I've mentioned is an enemy that threatens the way we all relate to each other. If I'm not vigilant about it, I just may find that some of this contempt has ebbed into my own way of thinking and viewing others. I sense

my own hard edges and sometimes hear myself chinking against others.

Hospitality has not become easier since the original version of this book. The world has not become an easier place to live, and our lives together only grow increasingly complicated. Annie Dillard once wrote, “The way we spend our days is the way we spend our lives.” The way I spend my days—there’s a place to start.

To intentionally live counterculturally is not for the timid. Radical hospitality has not only a spiritual but a social and economic impact. Radical hospitality is not about being what one monk called “Minnesota nice” (referring to how really polite Minnesotans are); it is about transforming our hearts and our communities. It is about justice for every soul.

Hospitality as it has been expressed and lived within monasticism is a strong example to follow—but it isn’t the only way to live a hospitable life. The lessons we learn from monks are examples for us, but we confront the issues of hospitality in the realms of our own lives, most of which are not lived in monasteries.

My grandmother once told me that most people won’t care one way or another about me. She didn’t want to take a swipe at my self-esteem when she

uttered the words I've never forgotten. She was trying to make the point that my family loves me and most other people don't. These people who love me also influence me, but I have learned through the years that I can influence them as well. It's right here in my own circle of friends, family, neighbors, and coworkers that I most recognize my power for good and my ability to exercise that power.

One of the peculiarities about really hospitable people is that they don't go out looking for ways to be hospitable; they simply give it a try when there's a chance to do so. It isn't about results, it's about changing the universe by becoming available to one person in one sliver of time.

I knew a guy who was convinced that the new neighbor in his condo complex was out to find a husband and had set her cap for him. She had sent him a Christmas card, left a plate of cookies on his porch, and returned his dog when it had gotten away. He told several people about the "desperate attempts" she had made to get his attention. His words got back to her. Over lunch one day, he told me that she pounded on his door and when he opened it, she said that next time she'd call someone to pick up his dog if it got loose.

Through tears she said, “You could have given me a chance to just be your neighbor. Have you never had a neighbor before?”

There’s a person in Scripture who asks Jesus, “Who is my neighbor?” The person asking the question wanted to be sure he got it right, in a legalistic sense. We get the impression that the questioner is concerned with doing the minimum expected from him by the law. Plus, what might be the consequences of being neighborly to someone who isn’t actually a neighbor? It would have been helpful had Jesus set up terms and limitations to clarify what constitutes a neighbor. Instead Jesus told the story of the Good Samaritan, and in the story we learn that our neighbor is found in the opportunity.

Where the opportunity for hospitality exists—so does the opportunity to make a neighbor of a stranger.

In the monastery there are periods that call us to be a novice, a learner, to consider a new way of life, to begin a path. We don’t come fully into a thing without effort. To say yes to the call of hospitality is to move toward it and to live it daily in the simple ways we encounter others. We need not go looking for chances to invoke hospitality upon the unsuspecting. Instead,

we only need to consider the discovery of a neighbor in the stranger.

If we are going to reach the people who need the message of the gospel we will need to loosen our grasp on our churches. We hold too tightly to our idea of church, as well as to the buildings and programs. As individuals, we do the same with our lives. We clutch the familiar tightly and protect ourselves from anything or anyone that is unlike us. We guard ourselves from the threat of a well-intentioned neighbor.

We cannot journey down the gospel road this way. Instead, throw open the windows, swing wide the doors, crank up the music of our lives and our congregations. Amazing things will happen if we stop protecting ourselves and become available to others, radically available.

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# To Make a Beginning

**W**hy are you interested in hospitality? Maybe you are happiest when sharing your table, or your space, with a guest. Maybe you yearn for connections to others. Maybe you are startled by the deep well of cynicism you've discovered in yourself and you want to stop keeping people at a distance. Maybe you, like many others, are looking for ways to heal from the horrors of past abuses and atrocities. Maybe you're curious about monasticism and the spirituality of monasticism.

Monasticism has much to teach us about welcoming and connecting with others. In exploring the deeper meaning of hospitality in these pages, I will be using the Benedictine path of hospitality as a model. Hospitality is at the center of what it means to be a monk.

The monk is something of an archetype for one who is at peace, one who has centered into where they live, what they do, and who they are becoming. If you've known monks, you know that the real thing and the image are nothing alike. The monk needed a rule because he is as likely as you and me to struggle, resist, and resent.

We are created to serve God by loving and serving one another. We do so through clenched teeth with hushed mutterings and curses. Monks too. To be a monk means that other people are sometimes crammed down your throat as they join you at table, at prayer, and as they want and need something from you, seemingly wanting to rip a chunk off of you. Sounding familiar yet?

You have your own reasons for being interested in the subject of welcoming others, and it may or may not have anything to do with spirituality. However, I think it's impossible to discuss true hospitality without delving into spirituality. Real hospitality isn't about what we do—it's about who we are.

Spirituality is essential to this discussion because spirituality is essential to what it means to be human. The human spirit is home to our deepest desires and darkest fears. It is also the place from which you yearn

for a hand that will reach for yours. We both want and fear connecting with each other. Our resistance to others, resistance to change—these are housed in the mysterious realm of spirit. Our minds cannot conceive of solutions to our dilemma until our hearts are convinced to love. Because our ambivalence over connections with others is a problem of the heart and the spirit, the discussion will be largely spiritual.

When St. Benedict wrote of hospitality, he stressed the importance of welcoming the outsider, the poor, the pilgrim. Benedict understood that guests are crucial to the making of a monk. At the same time, we dare not view the guest as a tool in our spiritual development. Never, ever is the monk to understand hospitality as utilitarian; he should always see it as a welcoming of the Christ among us.

Benedict was a realist; he knew there would always be people at the monastery door. This was not a dreary reality for which he had to make allowances; it was a means of grace given to his monks, and he taught them how this complicated reality contributed to the making of a heart.

Guests are crucial to the making of any heart. Benedict instructed his monks to welcome the Divine

in the stranger. He told them to look again, look deeper when you look into the eyes of stranger. If you want to be a person of great spirit, you can't do life alone. If spirituality matters to you, you can't do spirituality alone either. To really grow as a human being you need other people. This conviction permeates not only Benedict's Rule but all of Christianity, and in any place where community is intentional.

The monasteries of Benedict's time, fifteen centuries ago, were small. Usually they housed about a dozen monks, making the monastery something like a large family. They gathered as a Christian household to live and grow toward the Divine together. To guide them in this effort, Benedict crafted a simple, short document called *The Rule of St. Benedict*. It is no more than nine thousand words long and seventy-three short pages. An average person can read it in about an hour. The Rule has endured for the past fifteen hundred years and shapes most of Western monasticism. For this reason, St. Benedict is considered by most to be the father of Western monasticism.

Hospitality is at the center of what it means to be a monk, but Benedict didn't come up with the idea. The Rule is based on the teachings of Jesus. Jesus. Not

a new improved guru for the new millennium, but the same old Jesus that the church has tried to follow for two thousand years.

A while back, on a chilly Minnesota day, a little boy was leaving a Christmas service with his father and paused at the manger outside the church. He looked at it, tilted his head for another angle, and then said to his father, “It’s the same Jesus we had last year. Can’t we get a new Jesus?” The father smiled and squatted next to his son. He was silent a couple of seconds and then said, “Son, we’re Christians. We get the same Jesus every Christmas. That’s how it works.”

In monasticism you don’t get a trendy new Jesus, you get the same old Jesus everyone gets. That’s how it works. The monks who have become spiritual and social guides for so many are not practicing a new religion; they practice a very old one, the religion based on the life of Jesus. The notion of being trendy in any way would make most monks cringe. Benedict wrote the Rule within the context of his Christian faith, and so his teachings cannot be separated from the teachings of Jesus.

The word *rule* is something of a problem for us. We automatically resist rules. It is a symptom of

contemporary life. Try thinking about it this way: A rule is nothing more than a set of ideas to help you determine the kind of person you will be and the course of your life. These ideas will be the reason you form certain habits (exercising, paying your bills on time, eating toast in the morning, meditating, and so on).

We all have some sort of rule we live by, consciously or otherwise. Your own rule consists of the little things you do that shape your life. The desire for balance or inner calm, the yearning for a life that feels right: these are the reasons we live by some kind of collected wisdom. Your rule of life is nothing more than what you have determined is most important to seeking and maintaining a meaningful existence. Your rule is a collection of what you think matters: I must be faithful to my friends, I must exercise, I must save money, I must take a couple of hours each week to be alone, I must make time to be with the people I love.

Your rule is what makes your life worthwhile. It is an expression of how you are spending your energy. It indicates what you value most. Your rule is the glue that holds your life together. It is the alarm that rings when your life is coming apart. By your rule, you make

choices about how you will spend time and resources; you make choices about how you spend yourself.

In a monastery, where people come together as strangers from a wide variety of backgrounds, some sort of unifying system is necessary. That is the purpose of Benedict's Rule.

Through the years I have been part of and have observed various experiments and experiences of community. In the years before Facebook, I was (with Jane Frith, the list owner, and Will Westerfield, who was not only a facilitator but a tech wiz) a facilitator on an e-mail list titled Oblate Forum. We were an international group, ecumenical and diverse in all possible ways. We had a common focus, though—Benedictine spirituality based on *The Rule of St. Benedict*. It would seem that such a common focus would have created some semblance of harmony among us. It did not.

As forum leaders, we spent a great deal of time dealing with the egos, prejudices, agendas, and general nastiness from some of our forum members. There was no real consequence if someone invoked our displeasure; these were adults. We could only call people back to the organizing principle. We would use the Rule to remind people of our common goals; we would remind

them that they agreed to certain rules when they joined the group. And then it would go well for a little while before another flare-up of ignorance and self-seeking behaviors occurred.

Generally, I was all for tossing the badly behaving members off the list. Jane was always more patient, more a peacemaker; Will was always more understanding and analytical. They would give people second and third chances. I could not escape my own impatience and intolerance in community with those hundreds of persons who were, in theory, like-minded. Community revealed to me the truth about myself.

The Rule in a monastery holds the place together. It is a central, organizing wisdom for monks who are trying to build a life together that points toward God. The Rule provides guidance, and it interprets gospel values in a way that is distinctive to Benedictines. In a family, we would probably consider the values shared by a couple a similar commonality upon which a life can be built.

*The Rule of St. Benedict* is not a set of legalistic rules or laws. We miss the essence of this ancient writing when we approach it in some literalistic sense. Rather, it is a collection of wisdom that has endured

the hard blows of constant change in the last fifteen hundred years. There is no shortage of monastic rules, but only Benedict's Rule has thrived. It is uncomplicated wisdom that can build a life and expand a heart.

Many ways of life nurture the practice of hospitality. Monasticism isn't the only model. Many people who have never heard of Benedict practice a deep hospitality. I do not mean to claim that any of the strengths described here are unique to monasticism. Monasticism is a path, a choice that honors the presence of God in all our lives. Respect for human beings is not merely taught by the Benedictine tradition; it comes to life within the person who attempts to enter the tradition. In these pages, I hope to open a door to a hospitable way of life.

*The Rule of St. Benedict* begins with an invitation to listen. "Listen carefully, my child, to the instructions of the spiritual master, and attend to them with the ear of your heart. This is advice from a father who loves you; welcome it, and faithfully put it into practice."

This is the core of monastic life. *Listen*. At the beginning, you are invited to open your ears, open your heart, and listen for wisdom, listen for a Voice,

listen for the *more* that is woven into all that is. This is the invitation and the call: listen.

Benedictine spirituality has a distinct ethos, which is learned through contact with the monks, through engaging with their way of life. Not everyone has a monastery down the road, however, so in these pages I would like to introduce you to St. Benedict Monastery, where Father Dan, a Roman Catholic monk and priest, lives. You'll meet some of the other brothers and priests. I hope you'll enter the pages and make the monastery your home for a little while.

The individuals in the community of monks are, like your own family or community, as distinct and different as individuals can be. They are gifted in many ways with strengths they bring to their community. Most have faults they also bring to their community. They are wonderfully human; they are tragically human.

St. Benedict Monastery is located in Oxford, Michigan, several miles up a gravel road that weaves toward the top of a hill at about twelve hundred feet above sea level. The setting was a glorious one long before religious orders constructed chapels and retreat houses on Draher Road in Oxford. In addition to

St. Benedict Monastery, Drahner Road is home to St. Augustine's House, a Lutheran community also based on the Rule of St. Benedict. Native Americans spoke of the region as being sacred. Those who have learned to *listen* are often aware a sense of holiness in the setting.

One very endearing old monk, Father Noel, has been with God for several years now. His life was an example of Benedictine hospitality. Father Noel and Father Dan were taking a walk on the monastery grounds one day. It was the kind of day made for a walk with a friend. A group of eleven- and twelve-year-olds from an institution for troubled children were on a tour of the monastery. They had arrived by hay wagon, pulled by horses with a couple of young drivers, probably in their late teens.

Acres of rolling grass invite you to stretch out on a sultry summer day and enjoy the soft grass and warm earth. The monastery grounds are well groomed, but the place doesn't feel like an institution. It is home to the Benedictines, and a home is what it feels like—an easy place to be. Something about the place is welcoming.

The two monks were enjoying one of those long, warm days of late summer. Guests were not as

common in those days, but when they showed up they were welcome. Occupied in conversation, Father Dan did not notice the hay wagon drivers until they came within a few yards.

“I was stopped in my tracks,” he remembers. “Right there on the yard in front of us, the two wagon drivers were passing a joint back and forth, looking completely at home, as if this was the most natural thing to do at a monastery. In case you’re wondering, it isn’t.”

Father Noel, born in Italy and a monk all of his adult life, had never seen marijuana. He was not a naïve or stupid man; such a thing simply was not part of his experience. Father Dan was a street smart kid raised in Detroit. Before he could demand an explanation, Father Noel spoke up.

“Young men,” he exclaimed with wide-armed relish, “we are so glad that you are with us today to enjoy the grass.”

It was an enthusiastic and heartfelt welcome from the hospitable soul of an old monk. The guys naturally thought he was one very cool old monk.

It would never have occurred to Father Noel to be suspicious of the young men. While many people would have considered them intruders, his welcome could not

have been more sincere. He was delighted to see the children of God enjoying the expansive grounds. He was very happy to see someone enjoying the comforts of the cool, sweet grass of the monastery.

I met Father Noel when attending a friend's simple profession as a monk. A simple profession is the first set of vows a monk takes early in his monastic life. Following the solemn ceremony, a party that includes family and close friends is common. On this occasion, good friends of the monastic community had prepared a wonderful meal.

During dinner, I sat between the newly professed monk and Father Dan, who was seated between me and Father Noel. The chairs were squeezed together and if you swayed even slightly you bumped shoulders with the guest beside you. It was charming and jovial. Lively conversation was constant. Monks are wonderful conversationalists and storytellers.

Father Noel's Italian accent remained thick until the day he died, so, the hospitable thing to do, thought Father Dan, was to make sure that I understood precisely what Father Noel was saying to me. He was seated squarely between us and in the perfect spot for this particular role.

Throughout the meal, Dan translated Noel's conversation to me, usually in a whisper and with a bit of commentary. Meanwhile the older monk talked with a lively animation, smiling most of the time. Father Noel and I had never met before, and being Benedictine, he was eager to extend a welcome and get to know the guest in closest proximity. Hospitality is at the core of Benedictine spirituality, and Noel was Benedictine to the marrow.

After the dinner, Dan wandered off to greet other guests. He did not notice as Father Noel found me while I chatted with a small group of women. Father Dan did not notice Noel waiting for just the right moment when Dan could not interfere.

With a lovely wide smile, Father Noel took both my hands and said in quite nice English, "Now we can really talk, eh . . ." as he motioned with his head toward Dan, the obstacle during dinner. Father Noel did not need a middleman for his hospitality.

Regardless of being an introvert by nature, Noel's sense of hospitality had been fostered by a lifetime of making himself open to the stranger. To him, hospitality was not about social graces but about mutual reverence. Father Noel knew that spirituality is about

relationships. Every man, woman, and child bears to us the presence of God.

Noel had the manners of man born in a certain European generation. He possessed the charm and the warmth. These are wonderful traits, but manners and civility are not at the heart of Benedictine hospitality, although we of course hope monks will not be rude or inconsiderate.

Hospitality does not focus on the goal of being hospitable. It is not about the one offering hospitality. Instead, it is singularly focused on the object of hospitality—the stranger, the guest, the delightful other. One of the inherent problems with programs to develop radical hospitality is the focus on hospitality as a goal. Hospitality requires that our focus is on the *other* rather than attainment of a concept.

Forget about turned down sheets, mints on the pillow, and towel warmers. Monastic hospitality creates sacred space where the guest is free to be alone, to enter silence, to pray and rest. No one is compelled to fill up the guest's spare time or set an agenda for him or her. Hospitality is openhanded. It's definitely not summer camp, but more like a refugee center for the traveler who needs shelter from thieves along the way.

If you are visiting a monastery and need someone to talk to, you will usually find an available ear, but they won't line up at your door to volunteer. The monks aren't there to keep anyone occupied or to be entertaining. Instead, Benedict tells us to offer an open heart, a stance of availability, and to look for God lurking in every single person who comes through the door. Monks do not consider themselves somehow polluted by contact with others. They aren't in a monastery to avoid people. This is a common misunderstanding of monastic life.

Monastic hospitality is devoted to the vision of unity among God's children. It is a necessary developmental vision for the monk because he will achieve no higher relationship with God, or others, than the one he achieves with himself. A monk's life presents us with a paradox. His life is a witness to us that, ultimately, we are all alone. We live and die alone. We wake up with only ourselves. We are never as fully understood and are never loved as well as we long to be.

On the other hand, the monk, to be a monk, needs people. He grows through encounters with others. He learns about himself as he is loved, annoyed, grieved, respected—all in community and with the guest. To

think of the monk as only a solitary is a mistaken notion. There is a great truth to the monk as a solitary, as one who lives alone with God, but that aloneness is not lived apart. It is lived in community.

I was leading a retreat for a group of United Methodist women and their guests. It was an overnight event. As usual, I had scheduled a time of silence after dinner. Most retreatants find the silence of a retreat difficult the first time they enter it. But it wasn't true with this group. They sank into the silence as if it were a big, overstuffed chair where they were joyfully content to remain.

Later that evening, I spent some time in the retreat house library, where about fifteen women caught up with me. They were interested in silence and solitude as it was experienced in a monastery and how to take that into their everyday lives. The intensity of their seeking was unexpected, but not a surprise. We sense, on a soul level, that monasteries tell us something important about how to live in times like these.

Whether or not our ideas about monasteries are true, what the monastic life represents to us is the thing we seek after. Not just the silence or the solitude. I think it is less the cloister we crave and more the

community. Maybe this is one of the reasons that churches and para-church organizations have been interested in radical hospitality. While the Rule of Benedict and monastic life are imperfect and human structures, it provides a starting place for the lessons in hospitality.

Monasticism was becoming popular, and you might even say monks were becoming trendy, prior to September 11, 2001. That event inspired much of the first edition of this book. We can no longer remember what the world was like before 9/11. For an entire generation, America lost her innocence that day. Within an hour of the collapse of the second tower of the World Trade Center, a woman on the streets of New York looked into a camera and said, “Nothing is ever going to be the same again.”

Father Dan was in Rome watching those unforgettable events unfold. He heard the woman make the statement about nothing ever being the same and remembers thinking, “She’s right, she’s absolutely right, but I wish she were wrong.”

We changed as a country and a community. Terror had come to our door. On September 10, 2001, it was considered spiritually enlightened to say,