

The Gift of Hospitality- “Keep on loving one another as brothers and sisters. Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers...” (Hebrews 13:1-2a)

By Bernita Tuinenga, Executive Director of Volunteers In Service

Imagine approaching a church as a total stranger and asking permission to use the facility for a memorial service and luncheon, **within the next 48 hours**. Two weeks ago, I was the stranger who approached a local church in search of a place to hold a memorial service for a family member who had passed away. The embrace our family received as strangers is one we will not forget. We were greeted with smiles and embraced with hugs and words of love. We were prayed over, cared for and welcomed before any discussion of logistics. We were invited to use their church facility all before they even heard our story and became aware of the challenges we would bring into their space.

Repeatedly we heard these words: “Thank you for allowing us to serve you, embrace you and love you. Thank you for allowing us to meet you and be part of this difficult time. Thank you for being part of our fellowship.”

We were even given a key to the church building as a way to simplify preparations. Even though the day of the service was a beautiful, sunny day, never did we feel like we were imposing on them in any way. They simply repeated how blessed they were to serve us and how blessed they were to know us. I left that day feeling loved but confused and repeatedly wondered, “What church acts like this and embraces with this kind of hospitality, a kind that values love and compassion and seems more concerned about hospitality than any other logistic, like forms and fees.”

As I’ve reflected on that experience I began thinking about the conversations I’ve had with deacons through **Volunteers In Service** in regards to benevolence requests. When someone, possibly a stranger, approaches a church in need of assistance, what is our response? Whether the individual is standing at the door of the church, or awaiting a phone call from a deacon, or simply randomly calling churches, what is our response? Are we embracing or suspicious, are we actively listening or do we assume we know their story because we’ve heard it so many times.

Is our attitude one of being blessed to serve or an interruption in my day?

Is the intake form first or completed at the end of an embracing conversation? Do strangers, walk away from a church they have approached feeling loved, embraced and care for? Do they hear the good news through our actions?

Well defined systems and intake forms are needed and helpful and are part of the structure at VIS. However, when the use of forms distracts us from extending hospitality first, we miss out on the most important opportunity we get, and that is *SHARING THE GOSPEL*. We live in a fast-paced world where check lists are much more efficient than hearing a story.

Hospitality takes time, it involves building relationships, but it’s the model Jesus gave us to follow and it grows the kingdom for the sake of eternity.

The church I approached left me feeling loved, cared for and invited in, no strings attached. I would run back to that church anytime, without hesitation because of how they made me feel. ***When the stranger comes to the “door” of your church, what would happen?***

I Peter 4:8-9 says, “Above all hold unfailing your love for one another, since love covers a multitude of sins. **Practice hospitality ungrudgingly to one another.**”