



We Welcome All!

From the St. Paul Justice and Witness Ministry

A number of us have participated in the St. Paul Justice book club over the last two years, where we've read books that address injustice in a variety of contexts, including racism, poverty, education, environment, and the criminal justice system, to name a few. Some in the group felt that simply reading about injustices without doing anything about it was insufficient, and formed the St. Paul Justice and Witness team.

Our goal is to work to change laws, policy, and practices that can help to bring about a more just world. We look for opportunities to do justice work in our wider communities, and we look for opportunities in our own St. Paul community, too. Some of our conversations about our church community have focused on hospitality – how we welcome everyone to our church life.

When our congregation came together in 2011 to create our mission statement, we agreed to include the phrase **“to accept and welcome all”** in recognition of the Christian practice to offer hospitality and to create spaces where we are accepted just as we are – beloved children of God. The St. Paul Justice team has been asking how we're doing with living into that statement. What do we mean when we say we welcome all? What does it mean to offer hospitality?

Jesus said, “When you give a luncheon or a dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, in case they may invite you in return, and you would be repaid. But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind” (Luke 14:12–13). Jesus continues, telling a story of someone who had a great dinner and his invited guests made excuses not to come, so the master tells his slaves to invite the poor, crippled, and blind, and when there was still room for more guests, they invited casual passers-by. In short, Jesus instructed us to welcome even people who cannot return the invitation. We invite to widen the tent, with no hope of a return benefit.

Imagine the apostle Paul spreading the Christian message to communities of Greeks who likely dressed differently, spoke different languages, held different religious practices, and ate differently than Paul without the open hospitality of those early church communities. How might the Good News have spread without the Jewish communities altering their own practices (like dietary laws and circumcision) to include the stranger, the other?

How is our St. Paul community doing in truly welcoming all? What practices might we need to change to make sure we're offering hospitality as Jesus instructed? In the coming weeks and months, the Justice team will offer up some thoughts and suggestions for us ALL to consider as we move down a hospitality path together.