

Opening the Doors of Hospitality and Creating Community A One Day Retreat

by Joan McGuinness Wagner

[*Editor's Note:* Joan's article stems from her involvement in Marianist Studies Program 2.0, a year-long assisted inquiry into the topic of the Mother of Jesus Is Here: Building Today's Marian Church, which was conducted by NACMS in 2018-19.]

Goal: To create an opportunity to reflect upon Mary's life and actions to be more fully Church with a Marian disposition, using hospitality to grow deeper in our relationship with God through community and family life.

Guidance for Implementing the Retreat

The introduction provides the key elements of understanding Mary as a person of faith and action. Her faith, her love of Jesus stands as a model of giving and receiving compassion that is transformative. The Scripture references are suggestions for pondering hospitality in a radical sense. Each Scripture reference is followed by some focus points and questions. The first question is personal; the second question is to be seen in terms of one's own actions in the faith community we call the Church. It is not directed at the institution or the hierarchy of the Church, rather it is directed toward those of us who call ourselves members of the Church. Depending on time, the facilitator would select the number and appropriate Scripture references used.

Introduction

As Christians (and especially as Marianists) we embrace a theology of Incarnation. We believe that God is present in each person. "We are all vessels for God, channels of God's presence and compassion to others."¹ We are God's presence in the world. We choose how to make that presence known to others. We can be very selective in our love and compassion or we can be open and giving. Mary is a human person who chose to be open in the most dramatic of ways. "Mary was a reed on which God played music, a nest for an infant, and a chalice for the wine of sacrifice and gladness."² There is no human who knew and loved Jesus more than his mother, Mary. She shows us through the witness of her life how to truly love Jesus. As the Mother of Jesus and first disciple, Mary embodies attributes which can aid us today (and in all times) in our journey to God. Mary models a deep and enduring relationship with God. This relationship was

¹ Kathy Coffey, *Mary* (New York: Orbis Books, 2009), 41.

² Coffey, *Mary*, 41.

based on trust, intimacy, confidence, hopefulness, courage, steadfastness, strength, love and faith. In Mary's willingness to listen to God, she literally "made room" in her body and in her life for Jesus. Her "yes" provided a physical place for Jesus to dwell in her womb, in her heart, and in her home. Mary looked into the eyes of Jesus with motherly love and gratefulness. She held his small body through his infancy and felt the warmth of his body next to hers. Mary shared with Jesus his wonder of this earthly world. Mary mothered him during his adolescent years, times of questioning and struggle. In his adulthood, Mary became Jesus' first disciple. She witnessed evil firsthand as her child, now an adult, was brought to trial, unfairly convicted, and publicly murdered before her eyes. "And through it all Mary of Nazareth kept pondering, kept thinking about the meaning of her life and the lives of those she loved, kept walking her journey with God."³ Mary, the woman of humble roots, stood strong and faithful. She is our guide and mentor to growing ever closer to Jesus.

The Church is our chosen vehicle to deepen our relationship to God through Jesus. Mary's model encourages us, not only as individuals but also as Church, to live more authentically the message of the Gospel. Employing her attitudes and actions creates the possibility of Church that is reflective of her way of "being" in the world. Some call this approach *Marian*. We, as the body of Christ, individually and collectively, are invited to participate in this maternal mission of Mary. The emphasis of this mission is to be a "family of disciples, gathered together, with respect for each one's gift and each one's needs. . . . Like Mary, we emphasize the role of nurturing life, forming and affirming, and creating unity, much more than judging and condemning."⁴ In replicating Mary's efforts to integrate Jesus' message in our lives we thus give witness to the Good News.

Why should we consider having Mary as a model for us and for the Church in these times? "Mary [is] the archetype of an attitude that is holistic, community-centered, welcoming, respectful of the earth and its inhabitants. She is a Mother who throbs with the dynamics of nature, receiving and nourishing life. She is a strong Woman in solidarity with the aspirations of a people that is poor, humiliated, and marginalized. Many of us think that the root of our cultural and spiritual problems is to be found in a masculine sort of aggressiveness, self-centered and self-assertive, thirsting for power. To counterbalance such tendencies, what spirituality could be better than one that is Marian and apostolic?"⁵

³ Elizabeth Johnson, *Dangerous Memories* (New York: Continuum International Publishing, 2006), 140.

⁴ David Fleming, SM, *Circ.* 7, Sept. 2000, 70.

⁵ David Fleming, SM, *Circ.* 1, Nov. 24, 1996, 7.

Introduction to Hospitality

“It is no use to say that we are born two thousand years too late to give room to Christ. Nor will those who live at the end the world have been too late. Christ is with us, always asking for room in our hearts.”⁶ Mary provides us with numerous ways in which to enter into relationship more closely with Jesus. For the purposes of this retreat we will reflect upon Mary’s gift of hospitality to create community rooted in the Gospel message. The hospitality Mary employed was characteristic of the times in which she lived. This retreat is geared to provide a space to consider ways to incorporate this Marian hospitality in our lives.

As we know Mary lived in community, both in her family of origin and in her nuclear family. Community can provide support and security as well as challenges for growth. Mary, as mother, teacher, and nurturer, showed Jesus the importance of community. The intimacy of these communities required constant hospitality, the sharing of food and spaces, faith life and presence, patience and compassion. Mary modeled this hospitality in their home life. Later in his adult life, Jesus replicated the hospitality he would have learned at home. He spent his brief life meeting and greetings others, traveling to where the Spirit called. “A dynamic community life takes us out of our isolation, and at least a little, out of our fearfulness. It gives us an identity and a sense of belonging.” The attributes of respect, listening, patience, and care form the foundation of the natural give and take of hospitality in community life. This effort to build and maintain community through hospitality is characterized by:

- A warm and welcoming environment
- An intentionality to meet people where they are, affirming others’ gifts and differences
- A willingness to be present to those gathered
- A desire to see God in one another
- An openness to change

This hospitality mirrors the inclusive, compassionate, and strong faith-centered care that formed Jesus in his early years. Jesus as a child learned about the faith through the narratives Mary shared with him. An integral part of these stories was the importance of welcoming the stranger.

This time on the retreat will address hospitality as a central means of striving to be faithful and a member of a faith-filled community—a community that is open, inclusive, and rooted in the message of the Gospels. Through Scripture we will ponder three essential parts of the gift of hospitality: giving, receiving, and transforming.

⁶ Dorothy Day, *The Catholic Worker*, Dec. 1945, 2.

Three Elements of Hospitality

Giving

“Hospitality 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. . . . The paradox of hospitality is that it wants to create emptiness, not a fearful emptiness, but a friendly emptiness where strangers can enter and discover themselves as created free; free to sing their own songs, speak their own languages, dance their own dances; free also to leave and follow their own vocations. Hospitality is not a subtle invitation to adore the lifestyle of the host, but the gift of a chance for the guest to find his [her] own.”⁷ In thinking about hospitality, the first thought for many is the idea of offering hospitality. It can be as simple as the gesture of inviting someone to meet for coffee or planning a meal for a group of people at one’s home. Embedded in this action is a desire to share a common experience. There can be a sense of satisfaction as one extends a welcome to others, a chance to willingly share one’s resources, however limited or generous. This gesture of goodwill comes with (knowingly or unknowingly) the reality of control. As host, we determine the time, the place, and the extent of the hospitality. Let’s consider some examples of hospitality as written in Scripture. Through the lens of hospitality, let us examine these familiar passages.

Announcement of the Birth of Jesus (Lk 1:26-38)

In the sixth month, the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a town of Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph, of the house of David, and the virgin’s name was Mary. And coming to her, he said, “Hail, favored one! The Lord is with you.” But she was greatly troubled at what was said and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. Then the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give him the throne of David his father, and he will rule over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.” But Mary said to the angel, “How can this be, since I have no relations with a man?” And the angel said to her in reply, “The holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. Therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God. And behold, Elizabeth, your relative, has also conceived a son in her old age, and this is the sixth month for her who was called barren; for nothing will be impossible

⁷ Henri Nouwen, *Reaching Out: The Three Movements of the Spiritual Life* (New York: Doubleday, 1975), 71.

for God.” Mary said, “Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word.” Then the angel departed from her.

- Mary is open to the angel’s message
- Mary hears herself called, “Favored one!”
- Mary asks for clarification

Mary opens herself to receive the gift of Jesus given by God. Recall times in your own life that you have received a surprising gift by being open.

In what ways does the Church receive and treasure God’s gifts? Which gifts come to mind?

The Birth of Jesus (Lk 2:8-20)

Now there were shepherds in that region living in the fields and keeping the night watch over their flock. The angel of the Lord appeared to them and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were struck with great fear. The angel said to them, “Do not be afraid; for behold, I proclaim to you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For today in the city of David a savior has been born for you who is Messiah and Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find an infant wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger.” And suddenly there was a multitude of the heavenly host with the angel, praising God and saying:

“Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.”

When the angels went away from them to heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let us go, then, to Bethlehem to see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us.” So they went in haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the infant lying in the manger. When they saw this, they made known the message that had been told them about this child. All who heard it were amazed by what had been told them by the shepherds. And Mary kept all these things, reflecting on them in her heart. Then the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, just as it had been told to them.

- Mary and Joseph share their humble dwelling with strangers

- Mary reflects and ponders the meaning of the shepherds' message
- Mary illustrates the potential of learning from strangers in our lives

Mary and Joseph shared the little they had with complete (and strange) visitors. When in your lifetime have you observed generosity such as this?

In what specific ways does the Church welcome those different from us? In what ways can we do this better?

Wedding at Cana (Jn 2:1-12)

On the third day there was a wedding in Cana in Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. Jesus and his disciples were also invited to the wedding. When the wine ran short, the mother of Jesus said to him, "They have no wine. [And] Jesus said to her, "Woman, how does your concern affect me? My hour has not yet come." His mother said to the servers, "Do whatever he tells you." Now there were six stone water jars there for Jewish ceremonial washings, each holding twenty to thirty gallons. Jesus told them, "Fill the jars with water." So they filled them to the brim. Then he told them, "Draw some out now and take it to the headwaiter." So they took it. And when the headwaiter tasted the water that had become wine, without knowing where it came from (although the servers who had drawn the water knew), the headwaiter called the bridegroom and said to him, "Everyone serves good wine first, and then when people have drunk freely, an inferior one; but you have kept the good wine until now." Jesus did this as the beginning of his signs in Cana in Galilee and so revealed his glory, and his disciples began to believe in him.

After this, he and his mother, [his] brothers, and his disciples went down to Capernaum and stayed there only a few days.

- Even as a guest, there are opportunities to provide hospitality or ease the burden of the host
- Mary is the quiet observer at the wedding; seeing the situation and knowing the implications, she reaches out to the one person who can address the problem
- Although Jesus does not indicate to her that he will respond to her observation, Mary continues to create a sense of hospitality by working with the servants
- Offering hospitality often requires us to do more than we expected

Although Mary and Jesus are invited guests at the wedding celebration, they find themselves offering their services to the couple. Given the same situation, how would you respond?

Reflecting on this reading, which role does the Church play? Mary? Jesus? The servants? The wedding family?

Parable of the Lost Son (Lk 15:11-32)

Then he said, “A man had two sons, and the younger son said to his father, ‘Father, give me the share of your estate that should come to me.’ So the father divided the property between them. After a few days, the younger son collected all his belongings and set off to a distant country where he squandered his inheritance on a life of dissipation. When he had freely spent everything, a severe famine struck that country, and he found himself in dire need. So he hired himself out to one of the local citizens who sent him to his farm to tend the swine. And he longed to eat his fill of the pods on which the swine fed, but nobody gave him any. Coming to his senses he thought, ‘How many of my father’s hired workers have more than enough food to eat, but here am I, dying from hunger. I shall get up and go to my father and I shall say to him, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I no longer deserve to be called your son; treat me as you would treat one of your hired workers.’ So he got up and went back to his father. While he was still a long way off, his father caught sight of him and was filled with compassion. He ran to his son, embraced him and kissed him. His son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you; I no longer deserve to be called your son.’ But his father ordered his servants, ‘Quickly bring the finest robe and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Take the fattened calf and slaughter it. Then let us celebrate with a feast, because this son of mine was dead and has come to life again; he was lost and has been found.’ Then the celebration began. Now the older son had been out in the field and, on his way back, as he neared the house, he heard the sound of music and dancing. He called one of the servants and asked what this might mean. The servant said to him, ‘Your brother has returned and your father has slaughtered the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.’ He became angry, and when he refused to enter the house, his father came out and pleaded with him. He said to his father in reply, ‘Look, all these years I served you and not once did I disobey your orders; yet you never gave me even a young goat to feast on with my friends. But when your son returns who swallowed up your property with prostitutes, for him you slaughter the fattened calf.’ He said to him, ‘My son, you are here with me always; everything I have is yours. But now we must celebrate and rejoice,

because your brother was dead and has come to life again; he was lost and has been found.””

- Despite terrible disappointment and grieving the poor choice his younger son has made, the forgiving father welcomes his son home
- Forgiveness and love characterize this story
- Jesus reminds us to be compassionate and to offer hospitality even when we are inclined to harden our hearts

At times when we experience hurt or rejection from someone we love, we often withdraw. The father in this story finds the way to move beyond his hurt. What do you need to enable you to respond as this father did?

In what way can you as a member of the Church extend reconciliation to someone or some group? What first steps are you willing to commit to?

Feeding of the Four Thousand (Mt 15: 32-39)

Jesus summoned his disciples and said, “My heart is moved with pity for the crowd, for they have been with me now for three days and have nothing to eat. I do not want to send them away hungry, for fear they may collapse on the way.” The disciples said to him, “Where could we ever get enough bread in this deserted place to satisfy such a crowd?” Jesus said to them, “How many loaves do you have?” “Seven,” they replied, “and a few fish.” He ordered the crowd to sit down on the ground. Then he took the seven loaves and the fish, gave thanks, broke the loaves, and gave them to the disciples, who in turn gave them to the crowds. They all ate and were satisfied. They picked up the fragments left over—seven baskets full. Those who ate were four thousand men, not counting women and children. And when he had dismissed the crowds, he got into the boat and came to the district of Magadan.

- Jesus is concerned about the physical needs of the crowd of people
- Jesus is confronted by the disciples
- The food Jesus gives is more than enough

“My heart is moved with pity.” Have you been witness to a similar situation, when the reality appears to be overwhelming, yet grace is there to make the difference?

Being Church is a powerful opportunity to share one's gifts. In what ways can the Church collaborate more effectively with others?

Receiving

In our lives there are times when we need help. It can be times of illness, life transitions, spiritual support, or countless other situations. As brothers and sisters in Christ, we need one another. As generous as it is to provide hospitality, being on the receiving end of hospitality is often difficult and uncomfortable. We lack control, we are vulnerable, and we are at the mercy of someone else. The ways in which we respond in these times is a manner of choice. We can choose to be gracious, to be open, to take a risk, or we can be closed and resentful.

Receiving hospitality can come from a desire to enter into a deeper appreciation or understanding of someone else—their values, customs, and beliefs. As Brother Steve Glodek, SM, stated in a presidential address to the Conference of Major Superiors of Men of the United States, “[C]ommunities must move from welcoming to developing the virtue of being welcomed. If we dare to go out and meet people where they are, we must let go of the control implicit in being the welcomer and allow ourselves to be welcomed. We must allow ourselves to be welcomed into other patterns of thinking and response, into other experiences of God and religious piety. We will have to let go of defensiveness and listen attentively to the other. Doing this is fraught with the anxieties of being rejected and being misunderstood. But allowing ourselves to be welcomed is also filled with the hope of blessing: that we will be larger and more whole.”

The following Scriptures are examples of people of the Bible and their stories of being a stranger.

Naomi in Moab (Ru 1:8, 9, 16-17)

Naomi said to her daughters-in-law, “Go back, each of you to your mother’s house. May the Lord show you the same kindness as you have shown to the deceased and to me. May the Lord guide each of you to find a husband and a home in which you will be at rest.” She kissed them goodbye, but they wept aloud, crying, “No! We will go back with you, to your people.”

But Ruth said, “Do not press me to go back and abandon you! Wherever you go I will go, wherever you lodge I will lodge. Your people shall be my people and your God, my God. Where you die I will die, and there be buried. May the Lord do this to me, and more, if even death separates me from you!” Naomi then ceased to urge her, for she saw she was determined to go with her.

- Ruth's abounding love for her mother-in-law transcends her fear of the unknown
- Ruth is willing to go to a place with no security or familiarity
- As she journey's with Naomi, Ruth embraces God's presence

Ruth shows her love of Naomi by giving up all that she knows and has grown accustomed to and takes the risk of entering into a new and foreign land. Have there been times in your life when you left the know to enter a different environment? What motivated you to take this action?

What are some instances when the Church has moved out its comfort zone to experience the reality of being a stranger?

Visitation (Lk 1: 39-56)

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

The Canticle of Mary.

And Mary said:

"My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord;
my spirit rejoices in God my savior.

For he has looked upon his handmaid's lowliness;
behold, from now on will all ages call me blessed.

The Mighty One has done great things for me,
and holy is his name.

His mercy is from age to age
to those who fear him.

He has shown might with his arm,
dispersed the arrogant of mind and heart.

He has thrown down the rulers from their thrones
but lifted up the lowly.

The hungry he has filled with good things;
the rich he has sent away empty.
He has helped Israel his servant,
remembering his mercy,
according to his promise to our fathers,
to Abraham and to his descendants forever.

Mary remained with her about three months and then returned to her home.

- Mary goes to comfort (or to be comforted) her cousin Elizabeth
- Both women are in the midst of an extraordinary revelation
- Mary's canticle is a message of praise and hope

Mary was in an extremely vulnerable personal situation. She set aside her own needs to assist her cousin, Elizabeth. Great joy was shared by both women (and their babies). Think of a time when you went to someone who welcomed you with complete joy.

Mary's canticle calls for a radical transformation to ensure God's justice and mercy. As the body of the Church, what efforts are you engaged in to participate in the proclamation of the Magnificat?

Flight into Egypt (Mt 2:13-23)

When they had departed, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, "Rise, take the child and his mother, flee to Egypt and stay there until I tell you. Herod is going to search for the child to destroy him." Joseph rose and took the child and his mother by night and departed for Egypt. He stayed there until the death of Herod so that what the Lord had said through the prophet might be fulfilled, "Out of Egypt I called my son."

- Joseph is the receiver, once again, of a message from an angel. He is a dreamer of spiritual dreams.
- This young couple and their infant child are given a warning of impending danger.
- The faithfulness of Joseph is evident by the quick departure into a foreign land, where he waits until it is safe for Jesus to return.

In the midst of chaos and fear, the young family fled to an unknown territory. When you hear of this occurring around the world, what does your heart tell you?

If we, as Church, want to live as Mary did, how can we listen more attentively?

Presentation in the Temple (Lk 2:22-38)

When the days were completed for their purification according to the law of Moses, they took him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord, just as it is written in the law of the Lord, “Every male that opens the womb shall be consecrated to the Lord, and to offer the sacrifice of “a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons,” in accordance with the dictate in the law of the Lord.

Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon. This man was righteous and devout, awaiting the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he should not see death before he had seen the Messiah of the Lord. Guided by the Spirit, Simeon came into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus to perform the custom of the law in regard to him, he took him into his arms and blessed God, saying: “Now, Master, you may let your servant go in peace, according to your word, for my eyes have seen your salvation, which you prepared in sight of all the peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and glory for your people Israel.”

The child’s father and mother were amazed at what was said about him; and Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, “Behold, this child is destined for the fall and rise of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be contradicted (and you yourself a sword will pierce) so that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.” There was also a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was advanced in years, having lived seven years with her husband after her marriage, and then as a widow until she was eighty-four. She never left the temple, but worshiped night and day with fasting and prayer. And coming forward at that very time, she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were awaiting the redemption of Jerusalem.

- Mary and Joseph went to the temple so that Jesus could receive a blessing
- In addition to the blessing, they were met by two strangers, faithful servants of God
- Mary and Joseph received more than they expected

Simeon shares an unexpected prediction. In your life, has someone given you information you don’t want? What was your reaction? Anna lived a long life of prayer and fasting. How do you sustain and grow in your prayer life?

*In your heart of hearts, what are you praying for? What are you hoping to receive?
In your experience, how can we as a Church be more open to the wisdom of elders?*

Foot of the Cross (Jn 19: 25-27)

Standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary of Magdala. When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple there whom he loved, he said to his mother, "Woman, behold, your son. Then he said to the disciple, "Behold, your mother." And from that hour the disciple took her into his home.

- The quick trial is over, the agonizing death continues
- Deserted by his closest friends, the face of his mother is within the gaze of Jesus
- John opens his arms and his home to embrace Mary

In the life of every person, sorrow, loss, and grief happens. Jesus tells us, we are not alone in this sorrow. When have you experienced heartache? How have you been comforted?

As a Church, how do we respond to the loss of loved ones or those suffering in our midst? How can we do more?

Transforming

The efforts of hospitality are good and yet can be finite. Hospitality—following Mary's example—invites us to be transformed. Our way of thinking, our assumptions are altered in some manner. We are not the same person after this experience. We are changed by the interaction whether it is in offering hospitality or receiving hospitality. This Marian tradition of hospitality is intentional and more than a single act of kindness or risk. It is ongoing. "Even at the end there was no end for her [Mary]. Even at the end, the only answer was to begin again."⁸

This radical hospitality, the Marian way of being, requires an openness to grow larger in our views, deeper in our understanding, more pliable in our hearts. This experience makes us more like Mary. Her openness, vulnerability, strength, and compassion can guide us in our attitudes and behaviors.

We return to the Gospel of Luke. As we read the passage, let us keep in mind the change which happens to Mary as she assents to the message of Gabriel.

Announcement of the Birth of Jesus (Lk 1:26-38)

⁸ Joan Chittister, *Mary Wellspring of Peace* (Erie, PA: Benet Press, 1987), 23.

In the sixth month, the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a town of Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph, of the house of David, and the virgin's name was Mary. And coming to her, he said, "Hail, favored one! The Lord is with you." But she was greatly troubled at what was said and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. Then the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give him the throne of David his father, and he will rule over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." But Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I have no relations with a man?" And the angel said to her in reply, "The holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. Therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God. And behold, Elizabeth, your relative, has also conceived a son in her old age, and this is the sixth month for her who was called barren; for nothing will be impossible for God. Mary said, "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word." Then the angel departed from her.

- In a time in history where being an unwed woman would result in death, Mary assumes the risk
- The angel's presence is brief, but the message is assuring and enduring
- Mary's fiat changes her life

Mary heard the word of God and responded. How is God speaking to you now? How confident are you to responding to God's call?

The world seems to be in the midst of upheaval in many areas. If we, the People of God, the Church, listen to God's message now, what are we being called to do?

Raising of Lazarus (Jn 11:17-36)

When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days. Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, only about two miles away. And many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to comfort them about their brother.

When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went to meet him; but Mary sat at home. Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died [But] even now I know that whatever you ask of God, God will give

you.” Jesus said to her, “Your brother will rise.” Martha said to him, “I know he will rise, in the resurrection on the last day.” Jesus told her, “I am the resurrection and the life; whoever believes in me, even if he dies, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?” She said to him, “Yes, Lord. I have come to believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one who is coming into the world.”

When she had said this, she went and called her sister Mary secretly, saying, “The teacher is here and is asking for you.” As soon as she heard this, she rose quickly and went to him. For Jesus had not yet come into the village, but was still where Martha had met him. So when the Jews who were with her in the house comforting her saw Mary get up quickly and go out, they followed her, presuming that she was going to the tomb to weep there. When Mary came to where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet and said to him, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.” When Jesus saw her weeping and the Jews who had come with her weeping, he became perturbed and deeply troubled, and said, “Where have you laid him?” They said to him, “Sir, come and see.” And Jesus wept. So the Jews said, “See how he loved him.”

- This is an intimate exchange between close friends
- Martha is distraught at the loss of her brother
- When Jesus saw the grief of Mary and Martha and the Jews who were weeping, he was transformed by their grief. His human heart was touched by their sorrow, and he was moved, changed, transformed

“And Jesus wept.” This singular line captures the tremendous compassion of Jesus. Looking back on your life, recall a time you were transformed by someone’s suffering. How did you respond?

In this time in the life of the Church, how can we respond more authentically to the sufferings of those in our communities, country, and the world?

Closing

Radical hospitality is a Marian approach to being Church in the world. It is an opportunity to reach across the voids of indifference and fear. “Like Mary, we emphasize the role of nurturing life, forming, affirming, and creating unity, much more than judging and condemning.”⁹ We strive to be more understanding, welcoming, and giving. We are willing to take the risks

⁹ Fleming, *Circ.* 7, 70.

embedded in leaving our comfort zones and entering into other cultures, geographical locations, and beliefs. We are on a Marian mission of extending and receiving radical hospitality.

As we contemplate our role and responsibilities in opening new doors of hospitality, we can reflect on the beginning of the ongoing Christian story. Perhaps the greatest action of radical hospitality was Jesus taking on human form. The Word became flesh and dwelled among us (John 1:14). The “us” is the great mass of humanity with all our hopes and fears. Jesus entered our “otherness” called humanity and was transformed. We now live in Christ and Christ lives in us. “This is our God: A God who chooses us as a preferred dwelling place and waits longingly for us to align our lives with God.”¹⁰ Mary, like a Church with a Marian lens, encountered all of life where it happened: the joys, surprises, the disappointments—all of the journey of life. Mary had a deep relationship with God. God entrusted Jesus, Son of God, to Mary’s loving care. Now Mary has entrusted us with this ongoing mission of Marian hospitality.

¹⁰ Stephanie Spelling. *Radical Hospitality: Embracing God, The Other and the Spirit of Transformation* (New York: Church Publishing, 2006), 35.

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Schedule

- 9:00 Opening and welcome
- 9:30 Introduction
- 10:00 Reflections on offering hospitality
Includes private reflection
Break
Small group discussion
- 11:30 Group feedback
- 12:00 Lunch
- 1:00 Reflections on receiving hospitality
Includes private reflection
Small group discussion
- 2:30 Break
- 2:45 Reflections on transformation
Private reflection
- 3:30 Quick pair sharing
- 3:45 Group response
- 4:15 Closing comments and prayer