



COMMUNITIES OF HOSPITALITY

Hospitality opens borders.
Communities of Hospitality are
moving forward along new roads
toward the revitalization of life in
common, like a sign that announces
the Good News, the Gospel. They
offer themselves like a breath of fresh
air inside the Church.



COMMUNITIES OF HOSPITALITY

The 'community of hospitality' harvests the legacy and the rich tradition of different ways of understanding what it means to live in closeness to the most vulnerable in our society. Different communal meanings of a particular dimension or perspective of our lives together have been minted over the years. In this way, we accept as our own the experiences of insertion communities, communities of life, communities of inclusion, welcome communities or communities of solidarity, among others.

Why 'hospitality'?

1.- Today, more than ever, geographic borders challenge us.

What do borders mean these days? When we approach the origin of the word 'frontier', we realize it has a rich and fertile meaning. Etymologically speaking, the word comes from the Latin 'frons-fontis', for face, forehead. When we place ourselves along the 'frontier', we come face to face with the other. Therefore, **the border or frontier is transformed into an opportunity of meeting and developing a fruitful relationship, with someone else, without wearing masks.** Taken from this perspective, the border becomes a place where we develop our own identity and the alterity (the ability to identify with another, 'otherness'). It is perhaps during that interpersonal dialogue that I might grow as a person, where my own identity is re-created and where I may learn from others. In short, the frontier or border is that privileged space not only of familiar and affective exchange, but rather a space in which the social, cultural, religious, economic and political acquire a special density. In this way, we are speaking of 'symbolic frontiers'¹.

¹ Itinerant Team of Amazonia: Called and Sent to Traverse Both Meanings of 'Borders'. https://theo.kuleuven.be/en/research/centres/centr_lib/artigos/2011-04-04-artigo-fronteras-y-esperanza-chile.pdf

2.- 'Hospitality opens borders'²

This is the slogan that the Jesuit Refugee Service adopted for its campaign to promote a culture of welcome, solidarity and the practice of peace, using hospitality as a means of achieving this goal. This is the kind of hospitality that encourages us to open our interior borders (fears, stereotypes and prejudices), placing ourselves in front of the other (foreigner, different) with an attitude of dialoguing and walking together.

The culture of hospitality opens up the padlocks of our internal borders, motivating us to open geographic and symbolic borders of exclusion between countries and in large cities. These borders have historically been created by States and have been increasingly reinforced by policies and evermore difficult migration laws. Hospitality changes this dynamic radically and helps us to construct open spaces for encounters of solidarity and brotherhood³.

3.- Hospitality, a call to welcome

The warm welcoming of migrants and displaced people is one of the pillars of a truly humane society, and needs to be protected through political and legal means. 'Hospitality is **the Christian expression of welcoming the other**'⁴.

Why are communities of hospitality important to our mission?

In our **Apostolic Project** sector, one of the strategic lines is that of '**community life inserted in populated neighborhoods, or open to people in situations of exclusion, and the affective closeness towards people who are served and accompanied.**' This welcome, insertion and hospitality have been cultivated by the social sector in diverse ways in our common mission.

² JRS Campaign. http://sjrlac.org/campaign_detail?TN=PROJECT-20131029082916&L=3

³ There is a very interesting initiative in this field, The **Hospitality Campaign** of the Jesuit Migrant Network, which seeks as its objective the construction of a public policy that is inclusive, welcoming, supportive and tolerant, above all, of migrant peoples who are displaced, imprisoned, refugees or deported, as well as of the diverse cultures of Latin America and the Caribbean. <http://www.campañaporlahospitalidad.com>

⁴ From the document *Challenges for Justice: In favor of a culture of hospitality and inclusion*. http://issuu.com/prensajesuitas/docs/retos_por_la_justicia

Saint Ignatius wrote to his companions in Padua that **'friendship with the poor makes us friends of the eternal King'**⁵. A friendship that becomes a gift and a wager. As always, when two individuals come together, one invariably ends up asking, who is helping whom? A wager that makes us trade places with the other, looking for points of encounter, of dialogue, of celebration. A wager which makes me truly perceive that my life has meaning only through others.

Fr. Kolvenbach would tell all of us in the Society of Jesus that our vocation as Jesuits must be understood as being *in favor* of the poor, although some (Jesuits) would be especially called to live *with and like* the poor. This being said, he saw preliminary evidence that 'it appears that contact with the poor is weakening...there is a diminishing number of Jesuits who work and live in contact with those persons excluded by social processes.'⁶

After eight years, in 2011, this same tendency continued to be repeated: 'From all regions come reports that **the number of our insertion communities is becoming smaller**, a fact that in the social apostolate is acknowledged with worry and sadness. This results in less contact with the poor and a lessened ability to generate friendships with them. We know that these communities continue to be worthwhile. At the same time, we believe that we need new models that will help us to grow as communities of solidarity with the poor. In some places this is being attempted, with communities trying to open their doors to people excluded, by living with them and making their presence visible within the surroundings'⁷.

In his letter favoring the unification of the Spanish provinces, dated June 21, 2014, **Fr. Adolfo Nicolás** reminded us of this preferential option: **'...the importance of not weakening the passion for the poor**. A province that is born with dimensions such as these, besides making visible those mystical dimensions of what it is, what it possesses and what it does, must also cultivate a sensibility toward the most vulnerable, if it does not want to convert itself merely into a complex structure of red tape. Experience tells us that where there are Jesuits and communities in contact with those people wounded by injustices, there is greater and more profound spiritual consolation. Without forgetting that loving poverty as a personal life option and being close to those excluded are the cornerstone of the credibility of the Society and the Church'⁸.

⁵ Letter from St. Ignatius of Loyola to the Fathers and Brothers of Padua, Rome 7 August, 1547, Number 3.

⁶ Conversations with the Assistance Coordinators of the Social Apostolate (2003).

⁷ *Invited to Collaborate*. Promotio Iustitiae. Nº 107. May 2011.

⁸ Letter from Fr. Adolfo Nicolás, 21 June, 2014.

Additionally, in his letter on reconciliation, **Fr. General** himself insisted once again on: **'Proximity to people and insertion in their lives.** That we be able to feel, not just know, the injustices, prejudices and offenses they suffer. In other words, if we are not courageous enough to accept our vulnerabilities with open arms and assume the risk of being wounded like Jesus, we cannot be agents of reconciliation'⁹.

In October of 2014, our **Fr. Provincial** presented the objectives of the provincial government for this term. One of them, the first – and the one upon which the others are based – is community: **'Hearts in continuous union'**¹⁰. You know it because you have experienced it: community is the result of an endless number of gestures of communion; and communion, the result of privileged moments of communication. Fr. General asks us to grow in our knowledge of one another. We will attempt to make our apostolic actions more permeable to the whole Province, regardless of its location in sectors and platforms'¹¹.

That closeness, that acceptance, that encounter with the other, that preferential option for the most vulnerable make us people and is the foundation of our vocation as Christians. We are not all called to live our lives in the same way, as Fr. Kolvenbach would say, but we all are called to open our minds, our hearts and our lives. We recognize that our communities of solidarity and hospitality are growing smaller in number within our Jesuit context, but we feel 'that where there are Jesuits and communities in contact with people wounded by injustices, there is greater and more profound spiritual consolation.'¹² There are many community companions - men and women, Jesuits and people within the Ignatian Family, for whom this lifestyle and proximity are **models for the mission of the Society of Jesus within their local contexts.**

How can we not nurture this gift? How can we not make visible the fruit of so many daily encounters, the joy, the sadness... all of it a life-project? For many of us, hospitality communities are a benchmark in our common mission.

⁹ Fr. Adolfo Nicolás. Letter on Reconciliation, 8 September, 2014.

¹⁰ 'Ánimos en continua unión'.

¹¹ Provincial Father of Spain. Objectives of the Provincial Government for the 2014-2015 Term, 3 October, 2014.

¹² Letter from Fr. Adolfo Nicolás, 21 June, 2014.

Which elements define a community of hospitality?

Life in common is not easily 'encapsulated' in a closed and very limited definition, but from our vantage point, it ought to be characterized by several of these elements¹³:

5

1.- Share life in proximity to the most vulnerable and excluded.

In the Gospel, we find Jesus and his disciples **sharing at the table with the excluded and the poor, thus cultivating a culture of encounter**. Living side-by-side with such people is one of the principle signs of the 'Good News,' especially in times such as these in which individualism erodes mutual relationships and social exclusion deprives many people of the acknowledgement and friendship of others, as well as their human dignity¹⁴.

2.- A welcoming and inclusive communal lifestyle.

There is a Spanish saying that has no direct equivalent in English, 'el roce hace el cariño', which means something like, 'familiarity creates or breeds affection.' Living in nearness or proximity (to others), sharing in and experiencing their difficult and complicated realities, help us to see those difficulties, those realities, with **greater understanding, affection and solidarity**. As long as we are able to see with the eyes of the heart, without prejudices, we are **able to enrich ourselves**, to learn from diversity. We can see in diversity the opportunity to grow together. The situation experienced by many greatly vulnerable young migrants and by ex-convicts looking for a way to reintegrate themselves into society, are indicative of the very great need for hospitality and a welcoming, supportive refuge.

¹³ Here is a very interesting article which delves into this topic: Communities of Solidarity: Jesuit Communities Life style. Promotio Iustitiae 112. http://www.sjweb.info/documents/sjs/pj/docs_pdf/PJ_112_ENG.pdf

¹⁴ Communities of hospitality exist in diverse contexts. For example, within the Spanish Ignatian Family there are more than 15 communities of hospitality spread throughout the geography of Spain. Additionally, there are other well-known programs such as the '[Welcome Program](#)', developed by JRS Europe in France and as well as others like [Family Promise](#) and the [Interfaith Hospitality Network](#).

3.- An open way through mutual listening and shared learning..

To begin this process as a pilgrim, one need not be a 'super Christian' if such a thing exists. Nor does one need to be an academic expert in hospitality or social inclusion. **Anyone could be qualified to share one's life**, although one would do well to **cultivate certain sensibilities, flexibility and openness toward the other**.

Of course, in any learning process or act of mutual listening, there is a rather important presupposition: the availability of free, quality time in order to hear, to accept and, ultimately, to share one's life.

6

4.-The importance of reconciliation, healing, discernment and celebration in these communities.

Along with shelter, which is a most basic element, it is also crucial to **design a personal itinerary and a communal project where discernment and diverse factors** dealing with the recovery of the whole person lead to social integration.

Every community of hospitality ought to **create and encourage basic structures and rituals shared by the community** which serve to help and sustain the initial welcome, transforming that welcome into a true process of integration. Aspects such as communal meals, free and open meetings, simple care for commonly shared goods, the dividing and sharing of duties and tasks, etc., are all basic elements that facilitate the processes of reconciliation, discernment and celebration, among others.

5.- Invited to be witnesses of hope.

No one has ever said that communal living is easy. Upon living in a communal setting, soon enough one realizes the need to accept differences and to grow in mutual knowledge. Each of us has within both 'a wolf and a lamb'¹⁵ which need to be able to get along with others. Life together builds us up as people when we **accentuate gratefulness, acceptance, welcome and the vital reality** and lessen the focus on other aspects, such as demands, recriminations, and idyllic dreams.¹⁶ Communities of hospitality foretell the Kingdom when

¹⁵ Ignacio Boné: 'Wolves and Baby Lambs'. Pastoralsj.org.
<http://historial.pastoralsj.org/secciones/colaboraciones.asp?id=52>

¹⁶ Dietrich Bonhoeffer. 'Life Together'. Sígueme, 1982; y Dario Mollá: *Spirituality in Social Action*. CONFER 2013.

they invite us to sit together at the same table, to share life through those things that unite us and also that differentiate us...an **invitation to be witnesses of hope**.

What do communities of hospitality offer us?

7

Hospitality renews our communities, helping us to grow in **commitment and generosity**. The Church, in general, and the Society of Jesus, in particular, benefit from this lifestyle of communal living, by not only providing us with credibility, but also by **fostering greater efficacy within our apostolic life**. **Saint Ignatius** used to say that ‘friendship with the poor makes us friends of God’. In the address he gave at the Astalli Centre in Rome, **Pope Francis** himself reminds us how it is that vulnerability and poverty are privileged places of encounters with God: ‘The poor are also the privileged teachers of our knowledge of God; their frailty and simplicity unmask our selfishness, our false security, our claim to be self-sufficient. The poor guide us to experience God’s closeness and tenderness, to receive his love in our life, his mercy as the Father who cares for us, for all of us, with discretion and with patient trust’¹⁷.

To sum up, communities of hospitality **open new ways of revitalizing life lived together**, offering themselves as an invitation, as a breath of fresh air within the Church, like an advertisement announcing the Gospel’s Good News.

*Alberto Ares Mateos, sj
Social Delegate
Province of Spain*

Translation by Georgina Gomez-Bozzo
Washington, DC. - 2015

¹⁷ [Address of Pope Francis. Visit to the ‘Astalli Centre’ in Rome for the Assistance of Refugees](#), 10 September, 2013.



www.socialjesuitas.es