

# Primitive Hospitality

**prim•i•tive** |prim tiv| primary, as distinguished from secondary

**I**t came like a lightning bolt. News of our colleague's apparent suicide left us limp, stunned with sadness. Feeling desperately alone, our valued co-worker had succumbed to the oppressive weight of utter despair.

We were bewildered and shaken—feeling helplessly distant from the Cokesbury team that was across the country and out of reach except by phone and email. We needed a way to hold them and pray together. I called the nearby UM congregation and asked for help. The person in the office instantly communicated a heartfelt sense of urgency, compassion, and complete engagement with our situation. Juliette said: “We will do everything we can to help.” And she meant it. In short order confirmation came that one of the pastors had gone to the store and prayed with the staff for care of our deceased friend's spirit, for the family left behind, for the shattered hearts of co-workers; and asking for Jesus' mercy and consolation.

Hospitality offered by a congregation surely includes attention to extending invitations, offering convenient parking places, providing a friendly welcome, and giving clear information about how to navigate the facility and programs. **But at its core, Christian hospitality comes from a deep spiritual well and is profound, illuminating, and primitive.** It is about bearing witness to the saving love of God. It involves responding and moving out to embrace seekers where they are, having compassion for the stranger's pain, sharing with others their deep yearning for comprehension, and showing intense regard for the life circumstances of those we intend to welcome and want to serve with the heart of Jesus.

When I called Juliette, her sense of what to do was authentic, and the follow-up quick and certain. No doubt her church has a useful playbook for “how to be hospitable” that helps the staff and members welcome and embrace others. Yet what my colleagues and I experienced firsthand was not merely a technique but a way of living that provided what we needed most: the powerful and genuine witness of Christian love.

Neil M. Alexander  
President and Publisher  
The United Methodist Publishing House