

# Families Moving Forward Hosting Reflections



# Beacon

INTERFAITH HOUSING COLLABORATIVE

## Description

During a busy week hosting Families Moving Forward, coordinators and volunteers have many meaningful experiences. Hosting Reflections is an opportunity to gather and reflect apart from that busy time on how your congregation experiences hosting and its moments of joy and challenge.

This guide, which may be used by any clergy or lay leader in your group, can be adapted to include resources from your faith tradition. You are encouraged to share readings, scriptures, prayers, or other resources that are meaningful to your group in reflecting on the hosting experience.

Please be in touch with your Congregational Organizer to help you prepare for this conversation and follow up afterward. We hope you enjoy this time of reflection in your congregation!

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## Objectives

- Connect our offering of hospitality with our specific faith values and reflect on why we commit to hosting families in our congregation.
- Share stories of how we have been impacted by hosting. In a supportive group, we will learn from our own experiences with difference and develop understanding of others' points of view.
- Focus on reflection and relationship rather than logistics. This conversation is NOT evaluation of the program or our hosting, but a chance to deepen our sense of community and service. In telling our stories we may identify areas of growth or support needed in advance of hosting weeks.

## Facilitator instructions

### *In advance:*

- Advertise to your volunteers. Get RSVPs so you have an attendance estimate. Follow up with people you didn't hear from, making the effort to include. Work with your organizer or staff member to plan the time and assign roles for each leader involved in the hour. This activity can be done with any size group, and can be repeated once or more per year. You are welcome to adapt the story/reading section and prayers and share suggested readings or prayers for other groups.

### *Day of:*

- Set up the space and ensure there's enough room for everyone. If it is authentic for you, you may wish to light a candle, provide refreshments to share, or other practices of hospitality. It is up to you!
- Based on the size of your group, decide if you will break up into tables or pairs for part of the time, and make enough copies of the questions for each.
- We're providing this guide for a one-hour session. It is recommended to take closer to 75 minutes, adding the extra time to the section called "reflection on our hosting." You can also use extra time for gathering, catching up, having snacks.

### *Follow up:*

- Did anything come up in your reflections that might call for more discussion one-on-one? Is there any insight from the group that would be useful to talk about with Beacon staff? Is there a story that might inspire others (only to be used with permission, of course)? After your hosting reflections, please call your organizer to debrief. We appreciate your leadership!

## Hosting Reflections Guide

### **Welcome**

**(2 minutes)**

Welcome everyone. Tell the group that this is a time for them to reflect and grow personally from the experience of hosting families and to get to know each other better. This is not a time of evaluation but of reflection and growth. Ask a volunteer to read this opening poem.

Bring me all of your dreams,  
You dreamer,  
Bring me all your

Heart melodies  
That I may wrap them  
In a blue cloud-cloth  
Away from the too-rough fingers  
Of the world.

*Langston Hughes*

## **Introductions**

**(8 minutes)**

*For groups where everyone knows each other, you might not need to begin with names. But we suggest beginning with this intro anyway.*

I invite you to share your name and briefly what role you have volunteered for when we hosted Families Moving Forward.

Then turn to a neighbor – for two minutes each, share about the first time you visited this faith community (i.e. church, mosque, or synagogue). What did it feel like to be new here? If you don't remember, think of another time you were a guest somewhere new.

After four minutes: Ask for just two or three examples of what it felt like to be new here.

Thank you for sharing these memories as a way to begin our conversation about hospitality. Let us all remember that sometimes we have been guests, and sometimes we are blessed to be hosts.

## **Group agreements**

**(3 minutes)**

*Share these ground rules and ask if everyone agrees to them. Invite them to add others, like taking turns and waiting to share if others haven't spoken yet.*

Use "I" statements. I will speak from my own experience. If I'm describing my congregation or culture, I'll be specific about when I'm speaking my opinion and will be open to others who see it differently. Likewise, if I see something differently from my neighbor, I will take the risk to share. When we are talking about our experiences, I know they are not all going to be the same. As a group I know we will become more connected by noticing and appreciating differences rather than seeking or assuming agreement.

Use a "parking lot" – if questions or issues come up to be resolved at a later time (for example, should we serve the meatballs again? Do we need new games?), designate a member of the group to keep a list so the group may keep focused on the faith reflection and telling of stories. *Ask for a volunteer to take notes for a "parking lot" of questions for later.*

**Reading****(3 minutes)**

**Two options** – Genesis 18:1-8 (Abraham's tent) or Luke 10:38-42 (Martha and Mary). *Use any translation you prefer. Also, leaders may feel free to choose another reading or resource from your tradition that can be a starting point for discussion of hospitality. Please share with us so we can add to this resource!*

**Reflection on the reading****(10 minutes)**

**OPTION 1 – Genesis 18:1-8.** *After reading, share this context:* Abraham and Sarah lived in a harsh climate where traveling from place to place meant needing to rely on the mercies of others when food and water couldn't be found. As such, hospitality became a cultural expectation, bringing honor to those who practiced it and shame to those who didn't. In this story, God, who has already promised to give Abraham and Sarah descendants and make them a great nation, visits Abraham and Sarah in disguise.

**Suggested discussion questions:** *Choose one of these pairs to begin, then add others as time allows. It is up to you how you use this time – and is not necessary to cover them all.*

1. What do you think made Abraham and Sarah offer hospitality to these guests? Was it social custom? Their generous hearts? Does it make a difference what their motivation was, and if so, what?

What do you think the motivation is for the hospitality we show through Families Moving Forward? Are some motivations better than others? Do our motivations make a difference in how we carry out the tasks of hospitality?

2. Abraham initially offers water and bread, but soon he and his household are preparing a lavish feast with bread with the best flour, milk and curds, and tender meat. Why do you think his hospitality grew more abundant? What might have made him decide to throw a feast?

When hosting Families Moving Forward, has the way that you showed hospitality changed? How so? What was the reason behind the change?

3. Abraham and Sarah do not realize that God is visiting them. If they knew it was God, how might their actions have changed?

Did you sense that God was visiting you through the families you were hosting? How did you receive and perceive God as you extended hospitality?

**Closing the reflection time:** Thank you for trusting one another as we begin to reflect on our practice of hospitality.

**OPTION 2 – Luke 10:38-42.** *After reading, share this context:* In this part of Luke’s gospel, Jesus is making his way toward Jerusalem and telling parables and teaching about discipleship along the way. Here he stops at the home of his friends Mary and Martha. Immediately preceding this story is the parable of the Good Samaritan and following it is Jesus’ teaching on prayer, including giving the Lord’s Prayer.

**Suggested discussion questions:** *Choose one of these questions to begin, then add others as time allows. It is up to you how you use this time – and not necessary to cover them all.*

1. Hospitality is about welcoming a full person. It does not happen without the concrete tasks of providing basic needs like food and shelter, but simply completing those tasks doesn’t mean one has shown hospitality. How did you navigate the tension of doing “Martha” tasks of making sure things were in place and the “Mary” posture of sitting in front of your sacred guests? Where did you walk this line well, and where did you have trouble?
2. Jesus says that Martha lacks “one thing” and that Mary has chosen the “better part.” What does Martha lack, and what is the better part that Mary has chosen? What is the difference between providing basic needs and showing hospitality? Where have you seen the difference between the two show up in Families Moving Forward?
3. Sometimes our guests from Families Moving Forward are eager to talk to us, just like Jesus delighted in talking with his friends. Sometimes they want to keep to themselves. What does it look like to be a “Mary” to guests who aren’t interested in forming a relationship? What does it mean to sit at the feet of someone who values their solitude?

**Closing the reflection time:** Thank you for trusting one another as we begin to reflect on our practice of hospitality.

*You are welcome to adapt this to the size of your group. These questions can be printed on half sheets and given to each group. Feel free to add your own – but it's not a survey! Just use them to guide discussion.*

In pairs, share a story from your FMF experience (3 minutes each – use a timer!). When was a moment of grace when you felt that something sacred is happening here? Or, when was a moment where you felt outside your “comfort zone”?

*In the large group, ask if there is someone who would be willing to share their story as a starting place to learn together. Others may then add from their own experiences as well.*

In this story, was there an encounter across differences? (Such as class, culture, race, language, gender, age). How do we react when we feel challenged to understand another's perspective? How can we be our “best self” in those moments?

What have our guests taught us about the experience of homelessness? And the experience of staying with us in our building?

What has our experience of hosting taught us about the need for affordable housing and rental assistance as well as shelter?

***Facilitator can add or listen for the following concepts to emphasize:***

- We host out of our commitment to hospitality, not for a sense of reward. Hospitality is what's needed and moments of relationship are a bonus!
- When we experience encounters that make us aware of differences such as race, culture or class, we can learn something about ourselves. We'll be doing this learning our whole lives, and our faith community is a safe place to grow.
- We cannot know what another person's experience is, nor can we “fix” their problems. But being present and willing to listen is sometimes the gift we can offer.

**Closing observations****(5 minutes)**

*If you split up for the sharing, bring the group back together.*

Ask the group to pause for 30 seconds of silence or so, to recall the stories and feelings that have been shared.

I invite you to think about our conversation tonight. Were there some themes or commonalities in some of our sharing? (Listen for examples and add your own observations.)

Were there moments of tension? (For example people experiencing a situation differently, or someone asking a question that made us think?)

How was our conversation connected to our faith?

Is there an insight about our practice of hospitality that we want to remember next time we host?

**Closing prayer****(1 minute)**

*Read or ask a volunteer to read this or another closing prayer or end with 30 more seconds of silence. Thank everyone for giving their time and participating in this time of reflection.*

God of many names,  
Sometimes you appear to us as a guest, to teach us about ourselves.  
You challenge us to offer our best selves, and to listen deeply.  
You invite us into the holy practice of hospitality.  
You call us to work for a world where all people have a home.  
Until that day, we are grateful for the chance to share this home with our neighbors of many faiths and backgrounds. May this be a house of safety, comfort and good company for all people. Amen.

*Thanks to Rev. Joel Bergeland (Mount Olivet Lutheran Church of Plymouth) and Rev. Emily Goldthwaite Fries (Beacon Senior Congregational Organizer) for creating Hosting Reflections.*