



Our Mercy Value for 2024 is Hospitality- Jennifer Oaten

What does hospitality really mean?

Hospitality is valuing each person for who they are. Not trying to change them but accepting them for who they are. It is about welcoming others and ensuring everyone feels a sense of belonging.

Catherine McAuley, founder of the Sisters of Mercy, showed incredible hospitality throughout her life. A great example of Catherine's hospitality was when she took on the legal guardianship of nine children: her five nieces and nephews, a cousin, and two children she took in from the street. All were orphans. She provided love, shelter and an education for these children.

Some years ago, while living in the UK I was privileged to study at Leeds University with other educators from around the world. My fellow students were from Argentina, Singapore, Norway, Saudi Arabia, Japan, Brazil, China and India. I was the only one from Australia. The diversity of these educator's experiences in their own country added great richness to our learnings. Each was a leader in education and had remarkable stories to share. This remains, as one of my most valued learning experiences.

While we're all very different we all felt welcomed and included.

Hospitality is not just the action of welcoming others, it **is an attitude**, a culture that extends beyond the surface, to fostering genuine connections.

Each person here tonight **is unique and special**, there is no one, the same as you on this planet- God has made each of us unique.

We need to ensure that every person in our community feels valued and a sense of belonging and are accepted and respected for who they are.

To show true hospitality, we must be **committed to breaking down barriers** and biases that limit inclusion. This requires a willingness to challenge our ideas. We often show greater trust in those who have similar interests, backgrounds, beliefs, or experiences as us. We tend to instinctively connect with those who are like us, so we need to be aware of this bias and reach out to others.

To be a more inclusive community that shows hospitality to all, we need to **learn about differences**, and understand the stories of others. We need to accept that people **are** different from us and that adds great richness to our community.

It is not enough to merely tolerate difference, true hospitality requires us to actively **seek out, embrace and value** diverse voices, experiences, and ideas. This brings different perspectives and ideas and enriches our experiences.

What actions can we take to show hospitality to others?

1. Try to understand the feelings and perspectives of others.

Your interactions can have a big impact on others both online or in person. Be attentive to those around you and seek to understand more about them. Value their ideas and opinions. The more we understand others the more we can call out unkind actions or words and create a connected community.

2. Make an effort to include others in conversations and activities so others feel they belong. It is easy to stay in our own friendship groups, both as students or as adults reaching out to those who are unfamiliar or different to you. Be open to new friendships and develop different groups of friends.

3. Listen to others because a listening ear and a compassionate heart can make a significant difference in someone's life. If you are a leader, value everyone ideas and opinions. We can all show others respect by listening and valuing what they have to say.

Pope Francis says,

"Today we are so busy and in such a hurry, with so many problems, some of which are unimportant, we lack the capacity to listen" and most importantly he says. "In the capacity to listen is the root of peace."

The ability to listen will help to bring peace in our friendships, peace in our families and peace in our community.

4. Show Small acts of kindness. This contributes to how we feel and how others feel and contributes to the overall wellbeing of our community. Do you smile at others in the corridors, hold a door open or lend a hand help build a supportive environment. Who have you shown kindness to, this week? What can you do to make others feel welcome?

In summary

- Hospitality is free.
- Hospitality is good for the giver and the receiver.
- Hospitality makes our community a better place.

So put away your mobile phones and reach out to others, listen to others and connect with others, because a sense of belonging and being valued as a person is one of the greatest needs of all people.

As we move forward, let us be champions of hospitality and inclusion. Let us create environments where the richness of our differences is not just tolerated but cherished. Let us all help create a community where everyone feels seen, heard, and valued.

And finally, one of my favourite quotes from Roald Dahl.....

"There are no strangers here, just friends you haven't met."

So, reach out to others with hospitality, there are many new friends to be made.