



THE CHURCH WELCOMING!

A Pastoral Letter to the Church of Pittsburgh on Hospitality and Community

Most Reverend David A. Zubik, MEd, DD | Bishop of Pittsburgh | Pentecost 2022



JUSTIN HEERMAN

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

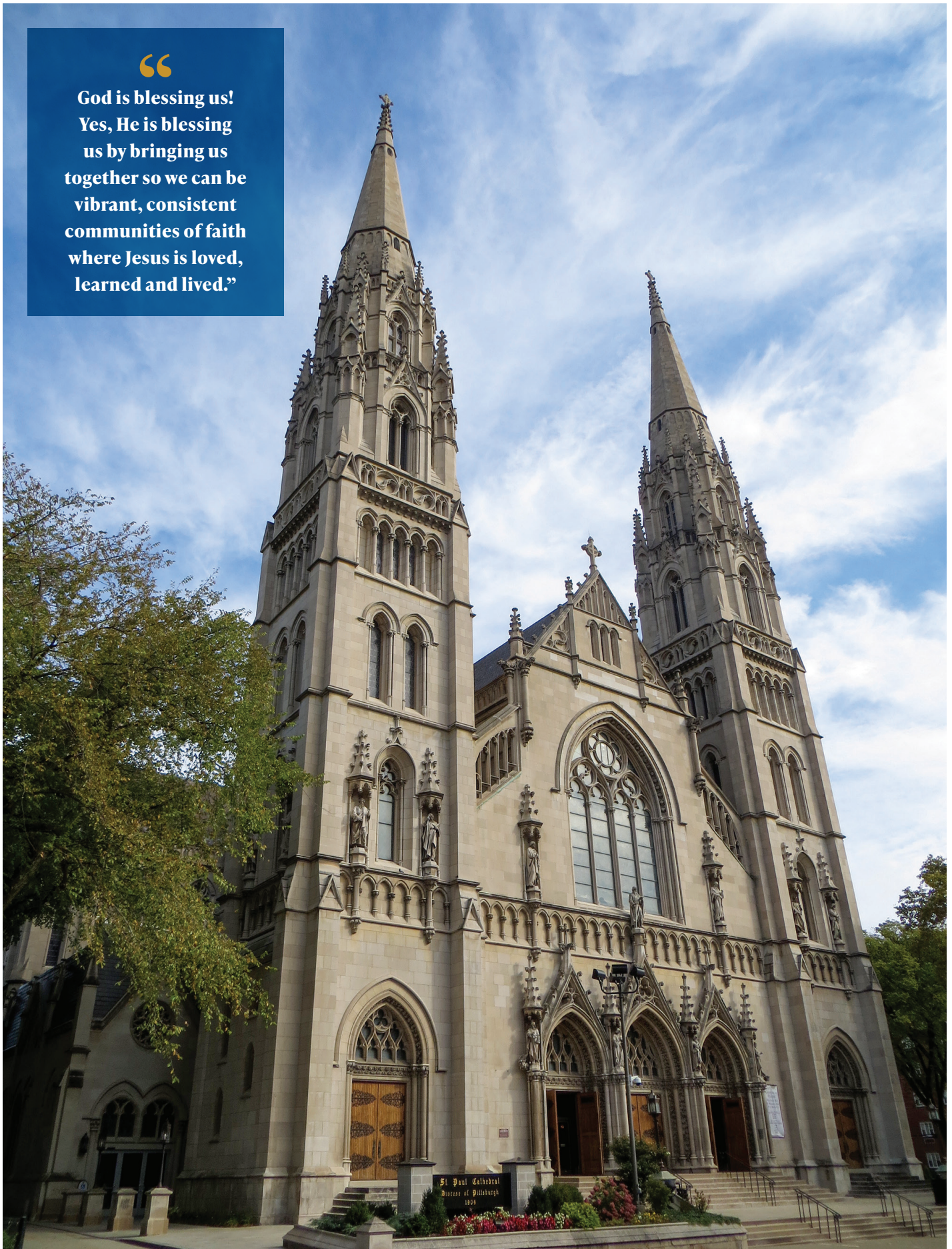
Introduction	5
What is hospitality	6
Biblical foundation for <i>The Church Welcoming!</i>	7
What it means to be <i>The Church Welcoming!</i>	9
How to be <i>The Church Welcoming!</i>	13
Conclusion	15

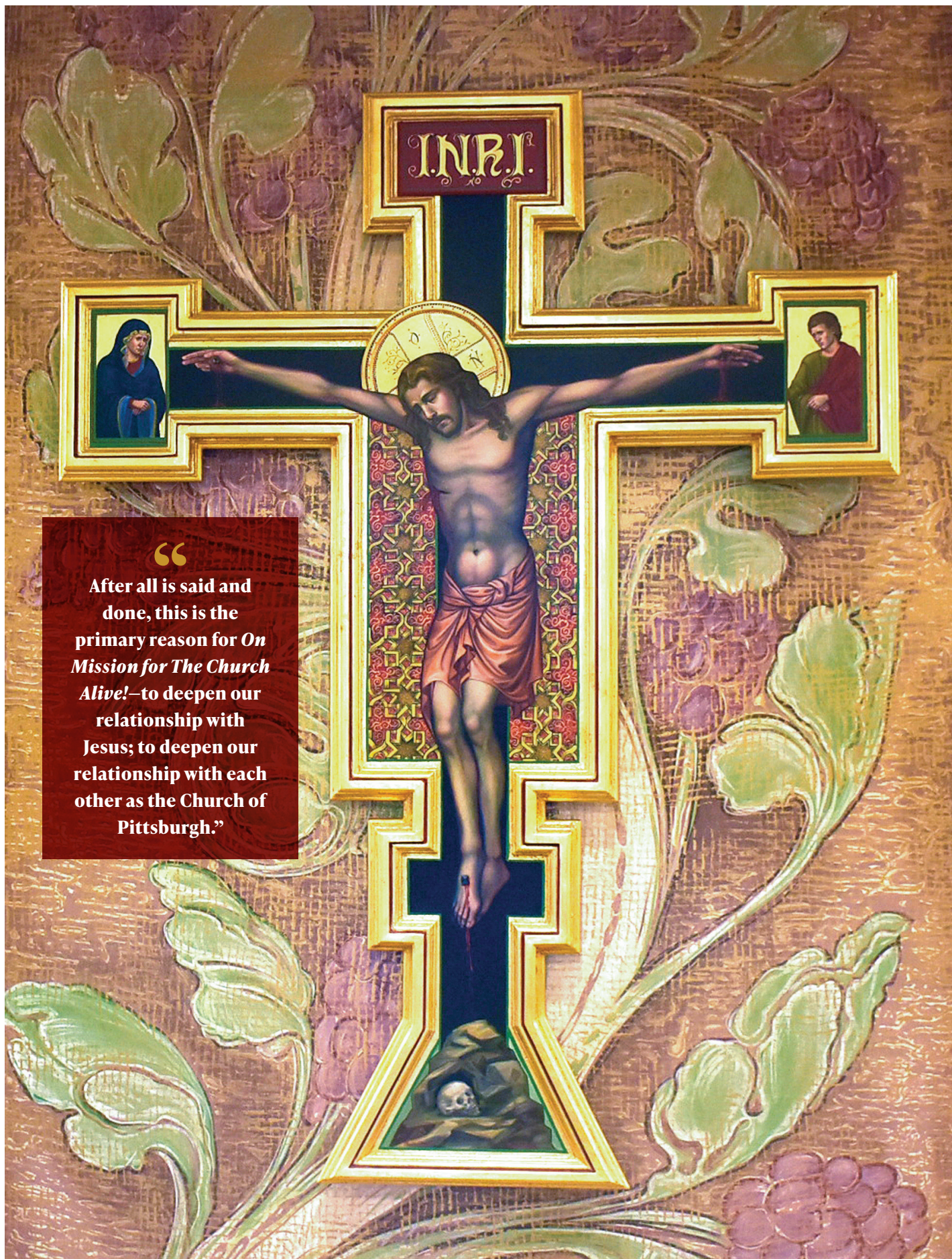
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“

God is blessing us!
Yes, He is blessing
us by bringing us
together so we can be
vibrant, consistent
communities of faith
where Jesus is loved,
learned and lived.”





“
After all is said and
done, this is the
primary reason for *On
Mission for The Church
Alive!*—to deepen our
relationship with
Jesus; to deepen our
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other as the Church of
Pittsburgh.”



INTRODUCTION

The Church Welcoming!

1. **M**Y EARLIEST RECOLLECTIONS of how I came to know the “art” of welcoming are about my beloved maternal grandmother. On occasional Saturday evenings when my dear mom and dad had a date night, my Baba became my sitter. I was so excited to stay overnight at her home. On Sunday morning, I would go with her to her parish church, Divine Redeemer in Ambridge. We always arrived an hour before the 11:00 a.m. Mass to join the other women of the Rosary Society of which my grandmother was a member. When I was with them, I was the only “guy.” The ladies gushed over me. They really made me feel welcome, really made me feel a part of them, really let me experience for the first time in my life *The Church Welcoming!*

2. My nickname for my grandmother was “Porchy,” a name I chose because every evening—as the weather allowed—she would sit on her front porch. There, I watched her do the same thing I had appreciated at the Rosary Society—I saw her welcome everyone who passed by. That was Porchy. Again, she made me aware of *The Church Welcoming!*

3. As we near the conclusion of our current phase of the Church of Pittsburgh’s *On Mission for The Church Alive!*, I keep thinking of Porchy. I can’t help but hope that the example of Church that she showed me would be the same kind of example we can all set for each other. We need to act as faithful members of the Church of Pittsburgh—excited about helping our diocese be *The Church Welcoming!*

4. To act as *The Church Welcoming!* is the way to form new parish communities of faith, hope and love in the six counties of the Diocese of Pittsburgh. It is the next step in our journey of being *On Mission for The Church Alive!* *The Church Welcoming!* is captured in these three living demands of our faith:

- welcoming all as if *they* are Christ;
- welcoming all as if *you* are Christ; and,
- welcoming all so, together, *we become* the Body of Christ.

5. These themes of welcome run throughout Christian



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■ Bishop Zubik’s beloved grandmother, “Porchy”

history and teaching. Welcoming all as if they are Christ is to imitate the Magi of Matthew’s Gospel. The Magi’s precious gifts were an offering of humble adoration and a sign that they welcomed the baby Jesus as their new king. In the fifth century Rule of Saint Benedict—a guide to Christian community—we are told to “welcome all as Christ.” This means to recognize our dear Jesus in every person. Jesus is the focus of our hospitality.

6. Welcoming all as if *you* are Christ is to display the radical hospitality of Jesus who dined with sinners and outcasts. Jesus’ ministry is inclusive. Jesus invites all to be His friend. Jesus is the model for our hospitality.

7. Welcoming all so that *we become the Body of Christ* is to realize that we are incomplete when even one person is missing from our community. We were all baptized into One Body (cf. 1 Cor. 12:12-13). Therefore, it is by welcoming and genuinely loving everyone that the Holy Spirit forms us into the One Body of Christ. Becoming the hands and the face and the heart of Jesus is the goal of our hospitality.

8. *The Church Welcoming!* is my invitation to the Church of Pittsburgh to continue to create new parish communities through Christian hospitality.



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WHAT IS HOSPITALITY?

9. **WE KNOW THAT HOSPITALITY is important as it is frequently mentioned in both the Bible and the Catechism of the Catholic Church!**

10. The dictionary defines hospitality as “the friendly and generous reception offered to guests, visitors, or strangers.” For us as Christians it is even more than that. Hospitality is the kindness we show to others. Hospitality is the joyful greeting when someone approaches. Hospitality is our willingness to patiently listen to others tell stories about their life, their hopes and hurts. Hospitality is making space in our hearts, and especially on our calendars, for people who may not be so easy to get along with. Hospitality is opening our homes to family, to friends, to coworkers, to neighbors, to those we may not be particularly fond of, and lovingly caring for them. Hospitality is our willingness to refrain from dismissing or excluding anyone for any reason. Hospitality is the capacity to accommodate the desires of others instead of insisting on our own wants or our own way. Hospitality is a virtue that needs to be

cultivated within us. One of the first lessons I learned as a priest is that we can never underestimate its power. Permit me to share a story.

11. On a Tuesday nearly forty-seven years ago when I was a “wet behind the ears” newly ordained priest in Shadyside, I learned just how impactful hospitality can be. I was experiencing a particularly bad day. I needed to prepare my adult faith formation class for that evening but the creative juices weren’t flowing. No inspiration for the class was forthcoming. To make matters worse, my efforts were continually derailed by interruptions at the rectory—too many incoming phone calls, too many unexpected visitors.
10. By supertime, frazzled as I was, I needed to take a break. I walked to the McDonald’s. Just as I sat down to eat, and especially to enjoy some peace and quiet, I felt a shadow “imposing” on my personal space. A woman approached and asked if she and her little girl could join me. My spirit felt anything but welcoming but the Spirit moved me to say “yes.” The conversation itself was not memorable. I thought nothing more of it until five years later on my last day at the parish. That day, I bid my farewell at all six Sunday Masses. At the end of the last one, the usher delivered an envelope which a woman had asked him to hand personally to me. It was from my McDonald’s dinner partner. As she wrote her best wishes for my future, she thanked me for making space at my table for her and her daughter. Then came the words that have shaped my ministry ever since. She confessed that on that evening, she had been on the way to kill herself and her daughter. She had stopped to have their last supper at McDonald’s. Whatever had transpired in our conversation, she had decided to live and to spare her daughter’s life. My hospitality had saved two lives. To this day, I get chills to think I, in a bad moment, almost told her to get lost. The Spirit saved the day.

11. Hospitality begins with relationship.
12. It is a way of being that defines the Christian life—a creative force vital to our Christian tradition. “Make hospitality your special care,” says Saint Paul in his letter to the Romans (12:13). Hospitality is the act of making room for others in our hearts and in our communities.¹ The Prophet Isaiah proclaims, “Enlarge the space for your tent” (54:2). In other words, get ready to share your life with others. Why? Because God is blessing you through relationships! God is blessing us! Yes, He is blessing us by bringing us together so we can be vibrant, consistent communities of faith where Jesus is loved, learned and lived. We are invited to enlarge our physical space, which only begins with sharing our favorite pew. We are also invited to enlarge our ideas of how to do things; to enlarge our imaginations to the possibilities of the Holy Spirit. Isaiah asks us to enlarge our relationships by inviting the sacred hopes and dreams of others to occupy our minds and hearts. This is how we are *The Church Welcoming!*



BIBLICAL FOUNDATION FOR THE CHURCH WELCOMING!

13. **THE CHURCH WELCOMING!** has its biblical foundation in the 24th chapter of Luke's Gospel—the story of the disciples on the road to Emmaus.

14. ► Now that very day two of them were going to a village seven miles from Jerusalem called Emmaus, and they were conversing about all the things that had occurred. And it happened that while they were conversing and debating, Jesus himself drew near and walked with them, but their eyes were prevented from recognizing him. He asked them, "What are you discussing as you walk along?" They stopped, looking downcast. One of them, named Cleopas, said to him in reply, "Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who does not know of the things that have taken place there in these days?" And he replied to them, "What sort of things?" They said to him, "The things that happened to Jesus the Nazarene, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and

all the people, how our chief priests and rulers both handed him over to a sentence of death and crucified him. But we were hoping that he would be the one to redeem Israel; and besides all this, it is now the third day since this took place. Some women from our group, however, have astounded us: they were at the tomb early in the morning and did not find his body; they came back and reported that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who announced that he was alive. Then some of those with us went to the tomb and found things just as the women had described, but him they did not see. And he said to them, "Oh, how foolish you are! How slow of heart to believe all that the prophets spoke! Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and enter into his glory?" Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them what referred to him in all the scriptures. As they approached the village to which they were going, he gave the impression that he was going on farther. But they urged him, "Stay with us, for it is nearly evening and the day is almost over." So he went in to stay with them. And it happened that, while he was with them at table, he took bread, said the blessing, broke it, and gave it to them. With that their eyes were opened and they recognized him, but he vanished from their sight. Then they said to each other, "Were not our hearts burning [within us] while he spoke to us on the way



and opened the scriptures to us?" So they set out at once and returned to Jerusalem where they found gathered together the eleven and those with them who were saying, "The Lord has truly been raised and has appeared to Simon!" Then the two recounted what had taken place on the way and how he was made known to them in the breaking of the bread (Luke 24:13-35).

15. The story of the two disciples describes both a literal and a spiritual journey. It recounts how Cleopas and his companion, after the crucifixion and resurrection of our Lord, walk about seven miles from Jerusalem to their village of Emmaus. It also outlines for us the journey that we all take. It is a journey from disappointment to hope, from confusion to clarity about Who Jesus is, from not recognizing Him to genuinely encountering Him. It is a journey from doubt to faith. We all need to make our own Emmaus journeys.

- Emmaus is a place of encounter with the Risen Lord—a place where our hearts still burn with joy at the recognition of Jesus our friend and Savior.
- Emmaus is an experience born out of disappointment but transformed by an openness to encounter Christ. It is an experience of the Church then and now.
- Emmaus offers us a way of being with and for Christ and one another.
- Emmaus provides hope and inspiration for *The Church Welcoming!*

16. What is the catalyst for this transformation on this journey? Hospitality and the Holy Spirit.
17. The two disciples we meet on the road to Emmaus have very heavy hearts. All that they hoped for, prayed for, worked for seemed to be lost. Jesus, Whom they believed to be the Messiah, was hung on a cross by the Romans, and then the tomb in which they had placed His body was found empty.
18. Some of you today may be able to relate to the disciples on the road to Emmaus. You may be feeling discouraged, disappointed or disengaged.
19. Jesus draws near precisely at this point.
20. Luke tells us, "Jesus himself drew near and walked with them" (Luke 24:15). Jesus Himself walks with you and me. Jesus is *On Mission* with us. We are not alone! Jesus is with us and we are with one another. God is always present and even more present in moments when we are saddened or suffering in any way. The theologian Paul Claudel states, "Jesus did not come to explain away suffering or remove it. He came to fill it with His presence." Jesus' presence is real.
21. However, the disciples on the road to Emmaus did not initially recognize Jesus. Eyes cast down, they were preoccupied trying to understand what had happened. They did not know it was Jesus walking right alongside

of them. *The Church Welcoming!* invites us to look up and to be aware of Christ's presence. We also need to pick our heads up to see Christ in our sisters and brothers. We are to increase our peripheral vision to see everyone, especially those on the margins.

22. There is a bit of humor in the story of Emmaus. As they are walking, Jesus asks them what they are talking about. It is, of course, His crucifixion and the news of His Resurrection. Cleopas asks Jesus, "Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who does not know of the things that have taken place there in these days?" (24:18). Jesus is the one person Who truly does know all that happened in these three days—that He suffered, died, was buried, and the Father raised Him on the third day. But Jesus is patient with them. Like a loving parent who knows that it is good for a child to get what is troubling them off their chest, Jesus invites the disciples to tell Him all about it.

23. This scene reminds us that quietly listening to one another's experiences and being a caring companion on our *On Mission* journey is a way of being Christ. Compassionately listening to one another is a way for us to be *The Church Welcoming!* It also reminds us to talk with Jesus.

24. After having heard all that happened in Jerusalem, Jesus explained to the two disciples what was said in Scripture concerning Himself. He cleared things up. He helped them make sense of their experience and realize that God was taking care of them. Jesus does the same for us when we spend time with Him in prayer. He is the perfect listener. As we move forward *On Mission*, let us stay close to Jesus in prayer so He can help us to understand and to trust.

25. The most important gesture of hospitality in all of history was when these two disciples on the road to Emmaus said to Jesus: "Stay with us" (Luke 24:29). Listening to Jesus made them feel so glad that they asked Him to come home with them. Inviting Jesus to their home changed everything for these two disciples, and it can change everything for us. Being *The Church Welcoming!* means inviting Jesus to come in. When we welcome Jesus into our lives, we become able to sincerely welcome others.

26. In their home at Emmaus, at the table with them, Jesus took bread, gave thanks, broke it and gave it to them. It was then that they finally recognized Him.

27. This encounter filled them with such joy that they ran all the way back to Jerusalem to tell the other disciples that they had seen the Lord. Imagine if they had not welcomed Jesus to stay with them! For us to be *The Church Welcoming!* we need to pray with these disciples on the road to Emmaus.

28. After all is said and done, this is the primary reason for *On Mission for The Church Alive!*—to deepen our relationship with Jesus; to deepen our relationship with each other as the Church of Pittsburgh.



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WHAT IT MEANS TO BE THE CHURCH WELCOMING!

29. **WE CAN SEE GLIMPSSES OF THE CHURCH WELCOMING!** in Scripture and in the teaching of the Church.

Images of The Church Welcoming! in the New Testament

30. Hospitality is not optional, it is a commandment. There are numerous examples of hospitality in the Gospels.

- Mary modeled hospitality at the wedding in Cana. She requested that Jesus provide wine for the guests, sparing the newlyweds embarrassment.
- Peter and his family opened their home for all who wanted to see Jesus, even permitting part of their roof to be removed so a paralyzed man could be lowered through it to receive healing from Jesus.
- Lazarus and his sisters, Martha and Mary, provided a base of operations for Jesus in their home in Bethany. From them we learn that sitting with our guests and being truly present to them is far more important than fussing in the kitchen.

31. Jesus embodied the welcoming nature of God. He displayed radical hospitality. This got Him in trouble with the Scribes and Pharisees, who were angered that He ate with sinners and tax collectors. He showed that his hospitality was from God when he twice fed a multitude with a few loaves and fishes. One feeding took place on the Jewish side of the Sea of Galilee, near Capernaum. The other occurred when He was on “the other side” of the lake in a Gentile community. These two stories demonstrate that Jesus feeds and cares for all, regardless

of ethnicity, religion, race, politics or economic status.

32. Jesus’ final act before He was arrested was to share the Passover meal with His disciples—a profound act of hospitality. John’s Gospel provides critical details that reveal the extent of Jesus’ loving hospitality in this tender moment in His life and the lives of His Apostles.
33. “He rose from supper and took off his outer garments. He took a towel and tied it around his waist. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples’ feet and dry them with the towel around his waist” (John 13:4-6).
34. Jesus makes it clear that we, too, are to show humble hospitality toward one another: “I have given you a model to follow, so that as I have done for you, you should also do” (John 13:15). Every Holy Thursday, at the Mass of the Lord’s Supper, the Church recalls not only this gesture of Jesus, but His mandate that we emulate His example.
35. There are four particular images of the Church in the New Testament that I invite you to join me in pondering as we seek to be *The Church Welcoming!* They are:

- The Church as a community gathered;
- The Church as the branches on the vine;
- The Church as a refuge for strangers; and,
- The Church as the Body of Christ.

The Church as a Community Gathered

36. The Greek word for “Church” used so often in the New Testament is “*ecclesia*,” which means “assembly,” or the “people gathered.” Church did not refer to a place or a building, but rather a people whom the Lord had called together.

37. In 1 Peter 2:1-5 we read:

► *Rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, insincerity, envy, and all slander; like newborn infants, long for pure spiritual milk so that through it you may grow into salvation, for you have tasted that the Lord is good. Come to him, a living stone, rejected by human beings but chosen and precious in the sight of God, like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.*

38. We are living stones, precious in the sight of God! Christ is our cornerstone, the stone at the foundation that holds us all together. We make space for each person. Our rough edges are made smooth so we can fit nicely next to one another. We are joined by the mortar of mutual affection. This is *The Church Welcoming!*

The Church as the Branches of the Vine

39. In recent years, I have been blessed to go on pilgrimage



to the Holy Land to see the places of Jesus' ministry, His passion, death and Resurrection. And in a deeply emotional way, in the very experience of the pilgrimage—I felt the hospitality of Jesus. We learn a great deal about the Gospels from the landscape: the desert valleys; the Judean hills; the fertile plains. We learn, too, through observing the vegetation: the lilies of the fields; the ancient olive trees; and the abundant grapevines.

40. It is significant that when Jesus describes His relationship with us, it is not a tree and branches, like the olive tree, but rather the vine and branches of grapes.

41. We read in the Gospel of John 15:5, 7-9:

► *I am the vine, you are the branches. ... If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask for whatever you want and it will be done for you. By this is my Father glorified, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples. As the Father loves me, so I also love you. Remain in my love.*

42. A branch can be easily cut off from a tree. In contrast, it is quite challenging to cut a branch from a vine. Vine branches have tiny tendrils that wrap themselves around each other, forming a tight network. Jesus is the vine and we are these branches that are woven around Him and one another. We hold on to Jesus and to each other, forming a strong, interconnected community. Bound to one another in love, we cling together. We are not easily cut off from Christ or from each other. This is *The Church Welcoming!*

43. Our parishioners in the Church of Pittsburgh know how to do this. Not long ago I went to a parish in Washington County to celebrate the Rite of Candidacy for one of our seminarians. (The Rite publicly recognizes that the Church is accepting a candidate for Holy Orders.)

44. The ritual celebration within the Mass was beautiful. But what was even more profound was how beautifully the parish community came together both within the Mass and afterward to support this young man on the road to priesthood. These are the virtues and skills that we all need to use to welcome everyone to our parishes, whether or not we know them.

The Church as Refuge for Strangers

45. In the letter to the Hebrews we read: "Let mutual love continue. Do not neglect hospitality, for through it some have unknowingly entertained angels" (13:1-2). Sisterly and brotherly love bridges the distance between strangers. When hospitality is displayed not just to those we know, but especially to those whom we do not know, this is *The Church Welcoming!*

46. My "Porchy" believed followers of Jesus must display hospitality to strangers—whom she viewed simply as friends she had not yet met. She embodied this virtue by sitting on her front porch to happily greet all who came

by. There, she offered a warm hello to Rudy, the vegetable, fruit and egg huckster, or a bright smile for the children walking home from school. Her welcoming heart is what led me, as a young boy, to give her the nickname "Porchy." The porch was her place of ministry, where she welcomed all as if they were Christ and as if she was Christ. This is *The Church Welcoming!*

48. And what an impact a welcome can have on us.

49. In the summer of 1967, I had received notice that I was accepted into the priestly formation program of the diocese. But I was sitting on the fence. I had also been accepted at several colleges, to which I had applied with the intention of preparing for law school. In July of that year, the seminary invited potential newbies to join the current seminarians for a Sunday afternoon social. Three seminarians in particular took me under their wing that day. Their hospitality convinced me that I should give the seminary a try. Needless to say, I am indebted and grateful for and to them to this day.

The Church as the Body of Christ

50. Unfortunately not everyone receives such a welcome in our gatherings. In his first letter to the Christian community in Corinth, Saint Paul had to address rivalry and jealousy in that church. Some members thought they were better or more essential than others.

51. In 1 Corinthians 12:12-20 we read:

► *As a body is one though it has many parts, and all the parts of the body, though many, are one body, so also Christ. For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body; whether Jews or Greeks, slaves or free persons, and we were all given to drink of one Spirit.*

52. *Now the body is not a single part, but many. If a foot should say, "Because I am not a hand I do not belong to the body," it does not for this reason belong any less to the body. Or if an ear should say, "Because I am not an eye I do not belong to the body," it does not for this reason belong any less to the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? But as it is, God placed the parts, each one of them, in the body as he intended. If they were all one part, where would the body be? But as it is, there are many parts, yet one body.*

53. Each of us has a role to play in the parish. Each of us is needed. No one member of the parish is more important than the others. Whether someone joined the parish fifty years ago or fifty days ago, all are to be cherished for their unique gifts. All are united by the Spirit and share in the saving mission of Christ. All work together to be the merciful face of God in the community. We invite all to participate in the beautiful work of Love. We are together as One Body. This is *The Church Welcoming!*

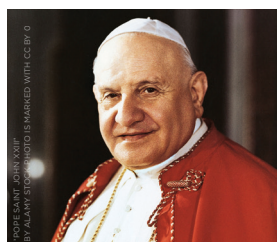


Images of *The Church Welcoming!* in the Teaching of the Church

54. Three Popes have served as inspiration for our *On Mission for The Church Alive!* Pope Saint John XXIII for his collaboration at the Second Vatican Council; Pope Saint John Paul II for his courage in confronting global challenges; and Pope Francis for his compassion in calling us to be the Church of Mercy.
55. What was my inspiration for choosing these three shepherds of our Church? During the Christmas season about a decade before, I was with family and noticed a little boy of about four fixated on the Nativity scene under the Christmas tree as other children played with their gifts. Finally, he demanded: “Hey, where are those three wise guys?” He, of course, was referencing the three Magi who were not yet under the tree because the feast of Epiphany had not yet come.
56. As we were in the earliest stages of *On Mission* in the middle of the last decade, I asked myself the question: “Who are those three wise guys for us as the Church of Pittsburgh at this time in our history?”
57. Each of these successors of Saint Peter provides us with images of the parish as a hospitable community. Their words and deeds can help us understand how we in the Church of Pittsburgh are called to be *The Church Welcoming!*

Pope Saint John XXIII

58. In convening the Second Vatican Council, Pope John XXIII welcomed the participation of every bishop, and he welcomed them as brothers. He



realized that to address the challenges of the modern world, the Church would need to invite broad consultation. He valued the input of people diverse in culture, language and life experience. His actions show us what it means to be *The Church Welcoming!*

59. Pope John XXIII was fond of saying that the parish is like “the village fountain,” where all can come and find refreshment. Do those in our neighborhoods who thirst spiritually or physically feel they can freely come to our parishes? Is the parish a center of life in our communities? If every parish becomes the place where people come in search of life-giving waters, then indeed, we are *The Church Welcoming!*

Pope Saint John Paul II

60. John Paul II was a man of courage. Resisting the Nazis, defying the Soviets, surviving an assassination attempt and enduring a debilitating disease reveal him as a man of tremendous bravery. In his apostolic exhortation *Christifideles Laici*, John Paul minced no words in stating that the parish is not a structure, a territory, or a building, but rather,



- the family of God, a fellowship afire with a unifying spirit (*Lumen Gentium* 28);
- a familial and welcoming home (John Paul II, *Catechesi Tradendae*, 67);
- the community of the faithful (*Code of Canon Law*, Can. 515, par. 1. 80.)

61. John Paul tells us boldly that the parish is a welcoming home, a place of comfort where all feel a sense of



belonging. No one is an outsider. People are known by name and cherished all the same. When a parish is a community of fearless folk where all can love and be loved, all can serve and be served, all can forgive and be forgiven, then it is *The Church Welcoming!*

62. Ultimately, what John Paul wanted us to remember, and to embrace with all our heart, is our serious responsibility of helping each other get to heaven.
63. Throughout his leadership as our Holy Father, John Paul reminded us of that charge, which is given to us at baptism. He was so convinced of that truth that he insisted that the last law in the *Code of Canon Law* as it was revised in 1983, must be:
64. *Salus populi suprema lex esto: the salvation of souls is the supreme law.* (Can. 1752)

Pope Francis

65. Pope Francis inspires *On Mission for The Church Alive!* with his compassion. In addition to being known as the Pope of Mercy, Pope Francis is also recognized as the Pope of Hospitality. Hospitality is a topic that he teaches both in his writing and through his living example.
66. At one of his first public audiences, a little boy decided to come up “on stage” to be close to him. The Holy Father’s staff was poised to block the little boy, but Pope Francis waved him forward. Hearts were warmed by the little boy wanting to wear the Pope’s “white beanie.”
67. Another time, Pope Francis invited two hundred homeless people to dine at the Vatican. The cardinal who welcomed them said: “this is your home, and the Pope is



pleased that you are here.”

68. Whenever a cold wind blows through Rome, Pope Francis invites homeless people to stay in the Paul VI Auditorium, where bishops from around the world usually gather for important meetings. In January of 2017, when the fountains froze in Saint Peter’s Square, the Holy Father asked that all Vatican vehicles be stationed near the homeless persons who refused to accept his invitation to come inside for the night so those people could warm up inside the cars, trucks and vans. In these acts, Pope Francis shows us what it means to go to the margins.
69. It is not just the physically homeless or the marginalized whom Pope Francis encourages our parishes to welcome, but also those who are spiritually adrift. Pope Francis exhorts us to open our arms to invite others to come to meet Jesus.
70. ► The Lord wants us to belong to a Church that knows how to open her arms and welcome everyone, that is not a house for the few, but a house for everyone, where all can be renewed, transformed, sanctified by his love, the strongest and the weakest, sinners, the indifferent, those who feel discouraged or lost. ... Are we a Church that calls and welcomes people with open arms or are we a Church closed in on herself? Are we a Church where the love of God dwells, where one cares for the other, where one prays for the others? (General Audience, October 2, 2013).
71. These are important questions for the Church of Pittsburgh. As we continue to be *On Mission for The Church Alive!*, parishes cannot be closed in on themselves. If our minds are closed, if our hearts are closed, we need to ask dear Jesus to send the Spirit to help us be open to new possibilities.





HOW TO BE THE CHURCH WELCOMING!

Welcoming All As If They Are Christ

72. **I**N EACH AND EVERY ONE OF OUR PARISHES, people should expect hospitality—a warm, friendly, generous welcome no matter who they are. “All are to be welcomed as Christ,” is the motto of Saint Benedict and should be our motto, too.

73. When do we “welcome all as Christ?”

- when they call on the telephone;
- when they visit the parish website;
- when they seek us out on social media;
- when they send an email;
- when they write a letter;
- when they knock on the door;
- when they are looking for a parking spot before Mass;
- when they are leaving the parking lot;
- when they sit in “our” pew;
- when they want to become involved in “our” ministry or work “our” booth at the parish picnic;
- when they have different experiences and ideas about parish life;
- when they are suffering or sick;
- when they are grieving;
- when they are afflicted or affected by addiction;
- when they are hungry or homeless;
- when they are lost or lonely;
- when they are loud or messy;
- when they are straight or LGBTQ;
- when they are “Christ in His most distressing forms” (a phrase used by Saint Teresa of Calcutta when encountering particularly difficult folks).

74. How do we make sure everyone feels “at home” as parish communities come together? When I visit friends, they fill the fridge with my favorite foods, and the freezer has my preferred flavor of frozen yogurt. They make up the spare room with fresh bedding. They show me how to work the TV remote and provide the Wi-Fi password. Throughout my stay, they ask if there is anything I need. They make me feel comfortable. That should help us think about what we do to help one another feel comfortable in the parish.

75. Here are a few questions we might all ask ourselves:

- Am I willing to park a bit further from the door to give others the preferred space?



- Am I willing to move to the center of the pew to make room for latecomers?
- Am I willing to say: “Hello! It is great to see you!” to familiar parishioners?
- Am I willing to introduce myself to parishioners I have not yet met?
- Am I willing to be patient as new ministers learn the ropes?
- Am I willing to warmly welcome new faces to my group or committee?
- Am I willing to give up the way “we have always done it” so as to be open to new ideas, to think outside the box?

76. How dynamic our parishes can be—how effective our witness will be—when we try to live this ideal of hospitality.

77. I am reminded of a Franciscan TV spot that aired in the 1960s, inspired by the Civil Rights movement.

78. It was filmed from the perspective of a person walking to some destination. When the individual meets a homeless beggar with a tin cup, he turns his head. When he is gifted with the smile of a woman of color,



he again turns his head. Finally, as he climbs some stairs and sees Asian children sitting on the steps, he once again turns his head. As he begins to open a door at the top of the stairs, the camera pans back to show it is the door of a church. The spot ends with a voiceover: “If you haven’t found God out there, you’re not going to find Him in here.”

79. We want others to find God in our welcome. We want to show the world that: “wherever that Catholic sun does shine, there’s always laughter and good red wine.”²

Welcoming All As If We Are Christ

80. Every day I witness Catholics showing what it means to welcome others as if we are Christ. My home is on our diocesan campus which is also home to Saint Paul Seminary. Every year a new group of guys moves in. Every year they must form a new community, taking into account the talents and temperaments of the new men who are joined to our seminary community. It is an adjustment for all. The veteran seminarians welcome our newcomers (much as the three did for me in the summer of 1967), get to know them, and then form a culture together. The “old ways” of doing things are not imposed. They learn about each other and find new ways of being community. All are made to feel a sense of belonging and purpose. Prayer is a necessary ingredient, but so, too, are laughter and listening. This is an example of welcoming which we can adapt to our parishes.

81. Another way to think about what it means for parish communities to come together is to consider what happens when a man and woman join their lives in matrimony. Marriage is a coming together of families. The married couple forms new customs and traditions. They make decisions together to set the course of their common life. There is give and take. This process requires a thousand compromises as they learn to blend together while striving to follow Jesus. This is also how a parish carries out its mission.

Welcoming All So That Together We Can Become the Body of Christ

82. Back in 2009, many of us saw welcoming play out on an international scale when the G-20 Summit of world leaders was held in Pittsburgh. In every city where the G-20 Summit had taken place, the host community experienced chaotic scenes of protestors rioting and setting fires in the streets. While there was some unrest here, Pittsburgh was much calmer. One reason, I believe, is that as the world leaders were gathering, religious leaders of thirty-eight diverse congregations gathered in Saint Paul Cathedral to pray for the global community; for humble and wise world leaders; for an end to war; for an equitable distribution of the world’s resources; for

migrants fleeing violence and oppression; for persons exploited by human trafficking; for those impacted by storms caused by climate change; and for the most vulnerable of lives, those in their mother’s womb. This shared prayer was, for me, an example of the power of Pittsburgh hospitality, offering a welcome and a beautiful witness to the world. Our own welcome to each other—to the communities of Catholics, Orthodox and Protestant Christians, as well as Jews, Muslims, Hindus and others who gathered in the Cathedral—was a sign of hope for peace in our day.

83. New demonstrations of welcome and hope continue to unfold in our Church of Pittsburgh. Over a year ago, all of our diocesan offices moved out to our current new campus on Noblestown Road. My dream for our former building has come true. Catholic Charities is moving its ministries for those in need to our former site on the Boulevard of the Allies. This strategically places their work with the poor, the sick, the troubled and the marginalized next door to the Saint Mary of Mercy site of Divine Mercy Parish, which continues to increase Saint Mary’s longtime outreach to the hungry at the Red Door soup kitchen. In addition, Divine Mercy Parish has opened the doors to Brother Andre’s Café at its Epiphany site as Down syndrome men and women provide hospitality in the form of coffee, pastry and smiles to their visitors. The tender welcoming spirit of Divine Mercy Parish, with their soon-to-be neighbor Catholic Charities, is transforming the intersection of Stanwix Street and the Boulevard of the Allies into a place of God’s love and mercy which is becoming known as “Compassion Corner.” It will be a profound sign of Pittsburgh hospitality from our Church of Pittsburgh.

Hospitality Isn’t Easy

84. Because the practice of hospitality involves giving of ourselves, it is a spiritual practice. It requires spiritual growth, which is often challenging. It necessitates practice and intentionality. It is not simply something that we do, it is who we become. Some cultures consider it an honor to extend hospitality because, in welcoming others, we imitate God.

85. Dorothy Day once wrote: “There are two things you should know about the poor: they tend to smell, and they are ungrateful.” Yet she continued to serve the poor every day out of her commitment to hospitality—a hospitality that affirmed the dignity of the poor and the right of every person to experience the graciousness and bounty of God’s love. She had no guarantees of what would come from her efforts, but she was undeterred. Dorothy Day held fast to these words in the first letter of Peter, and so should we: “Above all, let your love for one another be intense, because love covers a multitude of sins. Be hospitable to one another without complaining.” (4:8-9).



COURTESY PHOTO

CONCLUSION

86. **ONE THING I LOVE ABOUT** being a native of southwestern Pennsylvania is that people speak their minds. We are not afraid to let our feelings show. People have no qualms about sharing their opinions with me. As you can imagine, I hear much good, and also many complaints. It comes with being a leader. Whether a leader of a family, a team, an office, a business or the Church—leaders need to listen. Over the years, I have received countless letters, phone calls, emails and—more recently—tweets from parishioners telling me what they like or don’t like about their new parishes. Truly, I am grateful that people take the time to share with me what is on their mind.

87. One of my wishes as we journey forward *On Mission for The Church Alive!* is that my inbox would be flooded with messages from the faithful of the Church of

Pittsburgh, saying how very welcoming their new parish community is. What a joy it would be to read that folks feel a sense of belonging in their newly formed local Catholic faith family. I cannot make this wish come true. You and I must do so together.

88. Saint Paul describes how to do so in his first letter to the Corinthians. Corinth was a thriving city in southern Greece. Saint Paul had preached there and was particularly successful at bringing those who were poor and the working class into the Church. But only a short time after he left, word got back to him that the Christian community was splitting apart, spending more time arguing among themselves than spreading the Good News.

89. So he wrote to them, reminding them that each person has their own unique gifts and talents. He taught them to live faithfully by their baptism as he wrote:

► *If I speak in human and angelic tongues but do not have love, I am a resounding gong or a clashing cymbal. And if I have the gift of prophecy and comprehend all mysteries and all knowledge; if I have all faith so as to move mountains but do not have love, I am nothing. ...*

90. *Love is patient, love is kind. It is not jealous, [love] is not pompous, it is not inflated, it is not rude, it does not seek its own interests, it is not quick-tempered, it does not brood over injury, it does not rejoice over wrongdoing but rejoices with the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.*

91. *Love never ends. ... So faith, hope, love remain, these three; but the greatest of these is love” (1 Cor. 13:1-2; 4-8; 13).*

92. So, in the name of the Father, through the example of the Son, and with the help of the Holy Spirit, may every parish, school and institution in the Church of Pittsburgh truly be a community of living love, a community of faithful hospitality.

93. That’s the kind of Church my Porchy introduced me to more than seventy years ago. Now it’s my turn. Now it’s your turn—to be *The Church Welcoming!*

94. Grateful for our continued efforts together in being *On Mission for The Church Alive!*, and for our belief that “Nothing is Impossible with God,” I am

Your brother in Christ,

+ *David A. Zubik*



Most Reverend David A. Zubik
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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What have you seen or experienced that made you feel welcome – or unwelcome – in church?

Read Luke 24:13-25 The Road to Emmaus

2. How does Jesus offer welcome to you and to others?
3. What are some steps we can take to welcome Jesus into our lives, homes, and parishes?

A Welcoming Church

4. What does it mean to “welcome all as if *they* are Christ”?
5. What does it mean to “welcome all as if *you* are Christ”?
6. How does “welcoming all” as a parish community help us become the Body of Christ?
7. How did Jesus show hospitality to people who were marginalized or outcasts? How did many overtly religious people react?
8. What kinds of people in and around your parish community are most in need of welcome? Who seems to be excluded or marginalized?
9. What would everyone – especially those who have been marginalized – experience in a truly welcoming parish?
10. How does harmony within the parish affect our ability to welcome newcomers?

Creating a Culture of Hospitality

11. What habits or virtues should each of us cultivate to create a culture of welcome in the Catholic Church?
12. What obstacles interfere with offering hospitality as individuals and as a parish community?
13. What steps might the parish community take to help people who are new or marginalized experience welcome?
14. (Read 1 Corinthians 13:1-13) What would the Church – your parish church or the Church worldwide – look like and experience if every parishioner lived by this definition of love?



“

In the name of the Father, through the example of the Son, and with the help of the Holy Spirit, may every parish, school and institution in the Church of Pittsburgh truly be a community of living love, a community of faithful hospitality.”