


Dispassionate hospitality as a Christian value: A pastoral narrative

**Author:**Mwansa Claude Kimpinde¹ **Affiliation:**

¹Department of Biblical and Religious Studies, Faculty of Theology and Religion, University of the Free State, Bloemfontein, South Africa

Corresponding author:

Mwansa Claude Kimpinde,
kimpindemc@ufs.ac.za

Dates:

Received: 27 May 2024

Accepted: 17 Sept. 2024

Published: 19 Dec. 2024

How to cite this article:

Kimpinde, M.C., 2024, 'Dispassionate hospitality as a Christian value: A pastoral narrative', *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 80(1), a9936. <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v80i1.9936>

Copyright:

© 2024. The Author.
Licensee: AOSIS. This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution License.

This article is a reflective narrative on dispassionate hospitality as a Christian value, referencing Mount View Methodist Church (MVMC) and its community as a practical, pastoral example. It aims to challenge bias hospitality in the Christian community, by outlining the implications of an impartial hospitality through the scriptural presentation of hospitality, placed in parallel with the belated Christmas dinner at the MVMC. In light of these insights, I propose a new holistic approach to hospitality as a Christian value perspective through a pastoral narrative framework on inclusiveness.

Contribution: This article challenges bias hospitality in the Christian community by outlining the implications of an impartial hospitality in Christian community as a sense of dispassionate and inclusive hospitality, even though there is still some ground work to be done in respect of the radical and hypocritical biases of extremists refusing to align themselves to the current realities of globalisation as a sense of togetherness and inclusiveness in this diverse world.

Keywords: dispassionate hospitality; implication; Christian values; pastoral narrative; inclusiveness.

Introduction

This article is a reflection on a dispassionate hospitality narrative as a Christian value, and its implications at Mount View Methodist Church (MVMC).¹ In this perspective, dispassionate hospitality means an open and non-judgemental hospitality. Mount View Methodist Church is one of four churches for which I have pastoral charge in the Sheffield circuit, United Kingdom. Mount View is situated in the south west of Sheffield. So far, according to my observation from the attendance that afternoon and in the regular Sunday services, I may say that it presents primarily as a mono cultural, predominantly white, context. I have chosen this value and this particular context from an insightful and inspirational dinner that has been organised yearly by the MVMC 'leadership in the church hall'. Three-course meals were on the menu and served to families and community members. This fellowship gathering started as a belated Christmas dinner some years ago, as a response to many of the MVMC congregants and community members who were isolated, single and lonely, and who had not had a Christmas dinner with anyone, which others had been privileged to share. Later, it started to be used as a fund-raising event and an outreach to other churches and the community for fellowship.

This moved me to reflect on its implications on the MVMC and, on the other hand, a way to challenge a bias hospitality. My reflective insights were sourced from the scriptural background on hospitality in the book of the prophet Isaiah (Is 55:1–2):

... everyone who is thirsty, come to the waters; and you that have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labour for that which does not satisfy? Listen carefully to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food.

And Acts 2:42: 'They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer'. The hospitality value was appealing to me based on the love, fellowship and the sharing of the bread that was happening on that rectangular arrangement of

Read online:

Scan this QR code with your smart phone or mobile device to read online.

1.A Methodist congregation of which I had pastoral charged in the South Yorkshire, Sheffield in England. The Mount View Methodist Church in the UK has a rich history that is marked by several historical boundaries that have shaped its existence over the years. Here are some key historical boundaries to the church's existence, along with the corresponding years: *Contemporary Challenges and Opportunities (1980s-Present)*: In more recent years, the Mount View Methodist Church has faced contemporary challenges and opportunities, such as declining membership, changing demographics, and the rise of digital communication. The church has likely embraced new forms of outreach and engagement to connect with a diverse and dynamic community. By reflecting on these historical boundaries, the Mount View Methodist Church can gain a deeper understanding of its journey and legacy, while also discerning new pathways for growth, relevance, and impact in the years to come.

tables in that hall. Indeed, that was a spectacular opportunity for the gospel to be shared and an expression of love demonstrated by Mount View fellowship to those who responded to the invitation, from the families and the Mount View Community (MVC). This action was a platform for the church to reach out to the community by being pastorally and unconditionally prophetic at the same time.

To argue reflectively and contextually, I based this approach on the Bevan Model of Contextual Theology, as a proclamation of the gospel, in ways which are culturally appropriate and intelligible in the MVC context for ministry. In order to better place the reflection in its context, I was inspired by the Translation Model by Bevens (2013:212–215), ‘know the context so as to effectively insert the gospel’, which leads me in the following lines to start first reflecting on the etymological background of the word hospitality. The following approaches on hospitality from Alfen (2008), Stockman (2016), Vijver (1996), Anderson (2011) and Nouwen (1986) were informative to me, and I think them to be relevant to this pastoral narrative in this particular context as a social and religious value. This article examines the significance of dispassionate hospitality as a Christian value and as a pastoral narrative and was guided by the following question: How does the concept of dispassionate hospitality align with Christian values, and what role does it play in pastoral care and ministry?

Hospitality

This value, which is traditional and universal, is interconnected with values like kindness, attentiveness and respect. While hospitality is universally recognised as a shared value, its interpretation can vary across different times and cultures. According to Alflen (2008), there are some mutual elements that reoccurred as an answer to the question ‘when do you experience hospitality?’ Alflen (2008) states that people perceive hospitality when they sense a warm welcome, a human touch, autonomy, accountability and the freedom to choose. Hospitality is a sentiment that emerges from interpersonal relationships and is shaped by an individual’s personal encounters. Prior to delving into the various aspects of this phenomenon and the circumstances under which hospitality thrives, it is essential to revisit the past to understand the historical significance of hospitality and the diverse acts of hospitality that have occurred across different cultures and time periods. Hospitality is more than just providing shelter or a meal; it is about creating a welcoming environment where everyone feels valued and cared for. It involves showing warmth and kindness to all, regardless of differences. True hospitality is about genuine connection, empathy and listening to others’ needs. It builds community, fosters relationships and promotes understanding. Embracing hospitality means being open-minded, challenging biases and celebrating diversity. Ultimately, it has the power to transform lives, promote healing and create a more inclusive society. Ultimately,

hospitality is a powerful force for building connections, breaking down barriers and promoting understanding and empathy among individuals. It is a fundamental aspect of human relationships that has the potential to transform lives, foster healing and reconciliation and create a more inclusive and compassionate society.

Hospitality through years and cultures

During ancient times, hospitality was viewed as a fundamental aspect of humaneness and ethical conduct (Stockman 2013). The absence of hospitality was equated with a deficiency in civilisation. From a historical and etymological perspective, hospitality is linked to the welcoming demeanour extended towards strangers. I appreciate the way Vijver connects this concept to the Greek and Latin origins of the term hospitality. In Greek, the word ‘xenos’ carries dual meanings of ‘stranger’ and ‘guest’. Similarly, in Latin, these meanings are intertwined. The Latin term ‘hospes’ signifies ‘guest’, while ‘hostis’ originally referred to a foreigner (Vijver 1996). In earlier eras, hospitality was closely tied to the act of hosting individuals, particularly welcoming foreigners. It was viewed as a religious obligation, with various forms of hospitality outlined in the Old and New Testament, such as providing lodging, washing guests’ feet, preparing meals and ensuring safety (Anderson 2011:17). By the 4th century in early Christianity, hospitia were established as residences where pilgrims, foreigners, the sick and the elderly could find accommodation and care (Stockman 2008). During the Middle Ages, monasteries offered refuge to strangers. In Western society, Christian communities pioneered organised hospitality practices, laying the groundwork for the establishment of hospitals and care facilities for the elderly. Today, many healthcare institutions like hospitals, nursing homes, youth centres and schools trace their origins back to these early Christian communities. It is appropriate to also consider the ethical perspective of dispassionate hospitality. This biblical theology of hospitality, briefly outlined earlier in the text, ought to inform and transform reflections in the academy regarding community relations. Such reflections would, in turn, have a spillover effect through graduates who serve in the disadvantaged communities that abound in Africa, bringing healing and reconciliation.

Theological implication of dispassionate hospitality

Isaiah is clearly anticipating something beyond a mere delicious meal, such as the events unfolding at MVMC that afternoon. He is longing for a profound and complete connection between God and his people, a tangible experience of divine presence. This longing is symbolised by God’s act of providing and partaking in a lavish banquet feast with us (Is 49:9). The prophet Isaiah foresees God fulfilling the promises made to David and extends an invitation to the hungry and thirsty:

Everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and you that have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labour on what does not satisfy? Listen carefully to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food. (Is 55:1–2)

The prophet Ezekiel prophesies that when God sends his Davidic Messiah to shepherd his people, one of his responsibilities will be to provide nourishment and sustenance for them (Ezk 34:23–24). In essence, Israel eagerly anticipates a future where God and his Messiah extend a divine welcome, salvation and harmonious relationship with Israel through shared hospitality and intimate fellowship between God and his people (Pitre 2015:452).

This background provides the framework for comprehending Jesus' dining experiences and communal meals, where Jesus' gatherings reflect God's welcoming nature and provide a glimpse of the divine feast for a diverse array of individuals in the Gospel of Luke. This theme is evident in Jesus' famous sermon in Nazareth as recounted in Luke 4:16–30, where Jesus enters into the synagogue in Nazareth and reads from Isaiah scrolls:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me. He has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to preach release for the captives and sight for the blind, and to give release to the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's welcome. (Is 4:18–19)

Firstly, Jesus' ministry affirms the hospitality of the Lord God. Jesus proclaims that 'the Spirit of the Lord is upon me' (Lk 4:18a) and that his mission is 'to proclaim the year of the Lord's welcome' (Lk 4:19). The term 'Spirit of the Lord' refers to the divine Spirit, and the following phrase (in Lk 4:19) quotes Isaiah 61:2a, indicating that the primary reference of 'Lord' is the God of Israel. Therefore, Jesus' ministry is both empowered by God's Spirit and a demonstration of God's hospitality. In essence, 'the year of the Lord's welcome' is established and emphasised throughout the Gospel of Luke in the ministry of Jesus. This underscores a crucial point: Jesus is not merely a prophet or a significant religious figure; rather, his ministry embodies God's welcoming attitude towards those on the margins and those burdened with difficulties.

Secondly, while many translations render Jesus' statement as 'to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour' instead of 'welcome', it is worth noting that the Greek word *dektos* is used. Given Luke's consistent use of the *dech*-root for hospitality (evident in passages like Lk 9:5, 48, 53; 10:8–10; and also Ac 10:35), and the fact that those receiving the Lord's welcome are typically marginalised individuals in need of acceptance, it is reasonable to interpret Luke 4:19 as Jesus' foundational declaration that he has come to endorse divine hospitality and welcome for the outcasts and the marginalised. The programmatic nature of Jesus' sermon in Nazareth prompts readers to observe how his entire ministry, especially his meals with strangers, confirms God's hospitality towards the impoverished, the imprisoned, the visually impaired and the oppressed.

Thirdly, the expression 'to give release to the oppressed', spoken by Jesus in Luke 4:18b, is derived from Isaiah 58:6. It is valuable to delve into the prophetic message further by quoting the oracle in its entirety:

Isn't this the fast I choose: to break the chains of wickedness, to lose the ropes of the yoke, to give release to the oppressed, and to tear off every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, to bring the poor and homeless into your house, to clothe the naked when you see him and not to ignore your own flesh and blood? (Is 58:6)

The passages in Isaiah 61:1–2 and 58:6–7, referenced by Jesus in Luke 4:18–19, emphasise concepts of 'release' and 'welcome', indicating that Jesus' ministry aligns with the social justice, liberation, debt forgiveness and hospitality advocated by Israel's prophets (Hays 2016:225). This idea is encapsulated in the notion of 'divine hospitality to the visitor, outsiders, and sinner' ascribed to Jesus' entire ministry (Byrne 2000:48). By embodying the Lord's hospitality described in Isaiah, Jesus is portrayed in Luke as a gracious host who extends welcome by sharing meals with strangers, sinners and outsiders. Jesus' mission of endorsing divine hospitality is exemplified through his inclusive presence at meals with diverse individuals. This is what was happening at MVMC through the dinner. It was so exceptional and profound to me, and especially to those who were invited from the community and families. Mount View Methodist Church leadership has applied the above value from the book of Isaiah and the Gospel according to St Luke on the type of hospitality that Jesus was referring to. It was very interesting to me seeing such display in the church hall as a reminder to those who could not have family members or places to go at Christmas to receive a three-course dinner; this was such a particular and special treatment in a Church building for the sake of the love of brothers and sisters from the MVC.

According to Jipp (2013):

Considering the link between hospitality and devotion to the gods in the ancient Mediterranean, Luke concludes his second volume in this way to depict Gentile hospitality as the fitting response to Paul's message of God's salvation. This response positions them as models of hospitality within the Lukan narrative, contrasting sharply with the Roman Jews who reject Paul and his teachings. (p. 153)

It is through sharing meals with outsiders that Jesus establishes a welcoming environment where they can encounter the transformative presence of God, transitioning from being strangers to becoming friends of God. This was evident in the expressions of joy and happiness among those who organised the event that afternoon. For instance, Jesus' participation in the 'great feast' hosted by Levi the tax collector symbolises the restoration of Levi's broken relationships. Similarly, Jesus' meal with Simon the Pharisee serves as a hospitable setting for the 'sinful woman' to experience the saving presence of Jesus, leading to her encounter with divine forgiveness, peace and inclusion in the community and kingdom of God (Jipp 2013:171). When Jesus tells Zacchaeus that he must be a guest in his house, it fulfils Zacchaeus's desire to see Jesus, and their shared hospitality

further reinforces this connection: 'Salvation has come to this house today' (Lk 19:9). Indeed, I was having the same feeling as Jesus to say that had been extended to all those who were in that church hall. The shared hospitality between Jesus and Zacchaeus has provided the context for Jesus to share his presence with the outcast and incorporate him into God's family as a 'son of Abraham' (Lk 19:9). I strongly believe that among those present that afternoon, they indeed experienced some kind of belonging and felt welcomed in our midst. The warmth that filled the atmosphere in the hall that day was a manifestation of our Lord Jesus Christ's presence as discussed earlier in the text. I was extensively amazed by the interconnection between the two experiences: Zacchaeus when the Messiah was in his home and the vibe in that hall from that rectangular display of the tables and especially the smile on people's faces. The MVMC is sometimes used by the local Council as a voting station for the community, and people come in and out to cast their votes; but this event was so different and special to me, and gave me the opportunity to reflect on the kind of hospitality that the ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ points us as a standard for welcoming strangers and outcasts in our midst, such as happened that afternoon at MVMC offering a special treatment, love and indeed a pure sense of hospitality.

In the ancient world, it was common practice to share meals with one's family, friends and clients. As a result, many statements offer wise advice or moral philosophical instruction to give counsel as to the kinds of people with whom one should, and should not, share meals. The Jewish sage Sirach offers counsel that may seem quite sensible: 'Do not invite everyone into'; but this draws me to differ from this belief, as an African and Christian. Hospitality is not restrictive or framed to a category of some special individuals. There, we become selective and it will be against our value as followers of Christ. I would like in this instance to touch a bit on the bias hospitality that the western world has given to refugees from Ukraine, comparable to those fleeing from Africa, Syria, Iraq and Middle-East atrocities, as a result of war and social and economic crises. We need to make a clear difference in our approaches as believers and especially Christians to avoid promoting indirectly or directly a segregation or all the -isms that are related to be against a pure hospitality to all refugees despite our races, gender and so forth. Recently, the UK government is trying to institutionalise the policy on immigrants and especially those that are crossing the English Channel in small boats to enter the United Kingdom. This is quite a challenging situation at the moment, comparative to what the above conversation is inviting us to adopt as Christians. On the other hand, some Africans trying to cross the sea to Europe raised a very discordant debate in the European Parliamentary sessions and the Italian political sphere. Indeed, hospitality has a lot to offer to us in this world and especially in how to apply those values in our communities and churches.

Many of us will remember Jesus' parable of the lost son (Lk 15:11–32) and likely even the stories of the lost sheep and

lost coin (Lk 15:3–10); but how many remember why Jesus told these stories? Jesus tells these stories as a response to the Pharisees and Scribes who were angrily complaining about his extension of hospitality to the wrong people:

... and all tax collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to him. And the pharisees and scribes were grumbling, saying, 'This one extends hospitality to sinners and eats with them'. (Lk 15:1–2).

It should not escape the MVMC congregants that the charge brought against Jesus (extending hospitality to sinners and tax-collectors) is exactly what Jesus himself had described as the very purpose of his mission ('to proclaim the year of the Lord's welcome', Lk 4:19). Jesus' three parables, then, are a commentary upon the meaning of his extension of welcome through shared meals with the sinners and tax collectors. When Jesus shares table-fellowship with sinners, it is a portrayal of the divine shepherd's recovery of the lost sheep of Israel (Lk 15:3–7; see also Ezk 34:11–12). His sharing meals with marginalised individuals represents the essence of Luke's follow-up to his Gospel, the Acts of the Apostles, demonstrating the tangible presence of the resurrected Lord that persists in the act of sharing meals, providing nourishment and emulating Jesus' welcoming spirit. The community puts Jesus' teachings into practice by engaging in a form of hospitality and food-sharing that is not based on expecting something in return, fostering a sense of unity among a varied group of people from different social backgrounds (wealthy, impoverished, widows), cultural origins (Hellenists and Hebrews) and genders.

An African perspective of hospitality

In essence, African hospitality can be characterised as the act of generously giving without expecting anything in return. It can also be described as an unwavering willingness to share unconditionally, encompassing both social and religious aspects (Echema 1995:35). Ultimately, it entails a readiness to offer help, support, love and shoulder each other's burdens without prioritising profit or rewards as the motivating factor. Hospitality is a core value in African communities, fostering inclusivity and a sense of belonging. Growing up, my father's open-door policy towards friends and family exemplified this cultural norm. In African tradition, the saying 'the immensity of a forest is recognised by the number of trees' underscores the importance of valuing every individual for their contribution to the community. Olikenyi highlights the fact that African hospitality endures as a vital aspect of life on the continent, despite external influences and modern pressures (Olikenyi 2001:102).

The Methodist Church of Southern Africa's perspective on dispassionate hospitality as a Christian value can be academically analysed through historical and theological lenses. Understanding the church's historical context is essential, given its engagement with social justice and inclusivity. Exploring how the church promotes hospitality based on its Wesleyan heritage offers insights into its commitment to this value in pastoral care and ministry in the region.

Mbiti (1990) argues that:

African Religions and Philosophy' provides a comprehensive examination of the beliefs and attitudes that have developed regarding hospitality across various African societies. He introduces a fresh perspective on the history, thought, and way of life throughout the African continent. While the study of religion is framed from an African perspective, it remains accessible to readers from non-African backgrounds just as much as it is to those raised in African cultures as far as hospitality is concerned as a Christian value. (p 71)

Scriptural interpretation

Analysing biblical passages like Matthew 25:35–40 and Hebrews 13:2 sheds light on the Methodist Church's hospitality practice in Southern Africa. By interpreting these scriptures in context, scholars can grasp how hospitality is integral to Christian faith in the region.

Sihombing (2013) point out that:

The tradition of hospitality has been practiced by various cultures since ancient times and is seen as a hallmark of a civilized society. The Bible and other ancient texts document instances of hospitality offered to strangers—those who are dislocated, displaced, or marginalized. Hospitality involves treating strangers with kindness and generosity, helping them feel included in society or within a family. (p. 162)

Practical application

The Methodist Church in Southern Africa can demonstrate dispassionate hospitality through its congregations, missions and outreach programmes. By showcasing real examples of hospitality, in their different field of mission and project.

Scholars can analyse the impact of hospitality values on individuals and communities, focusing on power dynamics, cultural sensitivity and social justice within the Methodist Church of Southern Africa. By examining how the church addresses these ethical challenges in pastoral care, community engagement and advocacy, researchers can ensure that inclusivity is ethically prioritised. Studying dispassionate hospitality in the church can provide valuable insights into its theological, historical, practical and ethical dimensions, ultimately enhancing ministry and promoting transformative hospitality within communities.

According to Mercy Oduyoye, hospitality is intrinsic to African identity and is intertwined with religious beliefs derived from the Bible (Oduyoye 2001:94). Moeahabo Phillip Moila also views African hospitality as a fundamental aspect of African culture and morality, emphasising its practical application in daily life (Moila 2002:1). This highlights the broad and pervasive nature of hospitality in African societies, reflecting its deep connection to community, ancestors and spirituality. Archbishop Tutu further emphasises the interconnected essence of African hospitality through the concept of ubuntu or botho, which

embodies compassion, kindness and advocacy for others, promoting a shared humanity and unity within communities. Ubuntu embodies compassion, kindness and hospitality, along with advocating for others and embracing vulnerability. It recognises the interconnectedness of humanity, emphasising the importance of unity in diversity for building the house of Christ. Tutu highlights the value of interdependence, stating that our humanity is shaped by our relationships with others. This interconnectedness is essential, as breaking this fundamental law of our being can lead to various challenges.

The advocates of ubuntu view it as an African philosophy centred on the principle that 'A person is a person through other persons'. It emphasises community over individual interests, highlighting the interconnectedness of human well-being. This study explores ubuntu's link to hospitality and aims to extract principles for enhancing pastoral care. While ubuntu has limitations, it fosters hospitality, neighbourliness and a sense of responsibility towards all individuals (Gade 2012:486). As a moral framework in African contexts, ubuntu offers ethical standards that can be integrated into contemporary Christian ethics. This concept underscores the importance of holistic care rooted in the belief in the inherent dignity of every individual, aligning with Sartre's idea of being-for-others for equal ontological status in society. Gooden and Wooldridge argue for accepting others:

Africans hold a belief that is challenging to translate into English, referred to as 'ubuntu' or 'botho'. This concept embodies the essence of what it means to be human. You can sense its presence or absence. It encompasses qualities such as kindness, gentleness, and hospitality, emphasizing the importance of selflessness and vulnerability for the sake of others. It combines compassion with resilience, acknowledging that our humanity is interconnected; we can only truly be human in relation to one another. (Tutu 1989:69)

The concept of ubuntu, encapsulated in the maxim 'a person is a person through other persons', (Gade 2012:486) underscores the interconnectedness of human well-being and the importance of holistic care. This care is grounded in the belief in the inherent dignity of every individual, reflecting the divine image within them. This aligns ubuntu with the existential philosophy of Sartre, who posits that being-for-others is essential for individuals to attain equal ontological status within society. Gooden and Wooldridge further argue that 'to accept others requires a commitment that might cause one to tolerate and take affirmative action to make the difference in the country' (Poovan, Du Toit & Engelbrecht 2006:23–25). As far as the earlier discussed African value on hospitality is concerned, to ponder on the ethical perspective, it will be appropriate for a broad understanding of the dispassionate hospitality.

Focusing on Africa's dispassionate hospitality as a Christian value in pastoral narratives is significant for several reasons:

Cultural diversity

Africa's rich cultural diversity offers insights into how Christian values intersect with local customs, enriching our understanding of hospitality as a universal Christian virtue.

Historical context

Africa's history of colonisation and social injustices shapes its communities. Exploring hospitality in this context reveals how Christian values have influenced social dynamics and contributed to healing and reconciliation.

Contemporary relevance

Africa's current challenges require compassionate responses rooted in Christian values. Examining dispassionate hospitality in African pastoral narratives shows how churches address issues with welcome, care and solidarity.

Mission and ministry

Africa is a hub of the Christian mission and ministry. Studying how churches embody hospitality offers lessons on effective ministry approaches centred on compassion, justice and inclusivity.

Global perspective

Africa's diverse religious traditions and growing Christian population make it a focal point for global discussions on faith, ethics and social engagement. Focusing on Africa provides a unique perspective on these global conversations. As Dickson (1984) notes:

... in African thought, only those who have lived exemplary lives [*specifically hospitable lives*] can become ancestors; not everyone who dies qualifies as an ancestor. Therefore, the veneration of the dead should not be confused with the reverence for ancestors, which is tied to the cultural practice of hospitality. (Dickson1984:198 [*author's own emphasis*])

In summary, focusing on Africa in the exploration of dispassionate hospitality as a Christian value in a pastoral narrative offers a rich tapestry of cultural, historical and contemporary insights that deepen our appreciation of the transformative power of hospitality in Christian ministry and community life.

An ethical perspective on dispassionate hospitality

Vijver (1996) explores impartial hospitality by focusing on one's attitude towards strangers. He identifies three perspectives on foreigners: seeing them as vulnerable individuals in need, as potential threats or simply as different. Hospitality, according to Vijver, should be cultivated as a cultural value, promoting self-discovery through engaging with others. Nouwen (1986) echoes this view, emphasising creating a welcoming space for strangers to become friends, without seeking to change them. Hospitality, as Nouwen describes, is about offering freedom for self-discovery and embracing diversity:

Hospitality involves creating a welcoming space where strangers can transition into friends rather than foes. It is about offering a place for potential change without imposing it, allowing individuals the freedom to be themselves and explore their identities. This concept of 'welcoming emptiness' emphasizes acceptance and celebration of the stranger's uniqueness, encouraging open communication and mutual respect. Hospitality goes beyond mere accommodation, encompassing emotional support and affirmation of individual autonomy. (Nouwen 1986:79)

Stockman (2013) notes that the idea of 'welcoming emptiness' is a key aspect of hospitality, where strangers are welcomed as guests without pressure to conform. This approach celebrates the uniqueness of the stranger, encouraging them to share their thoughts and beliefs in a respectful environment. Hospitality goes beyond offering shelter, incorporating emotional support and creating a space for genuine self-expression and comfort.

Safety and freedom are essential for nurturing and practising hospitality, according to theologian Barth's (1936) framework outlined by Stockman (2016). By following four progressive stages – starting with making eye contact, actively listening, offering assistance, and approaching interactions with joy – ordinary encounters can transform into hospitable exchanges. This process, akin to realising the Kingdom of God, emphasises recognising others, understanding their needs and responding with care and enthusiasm. These principles align with the Christian concept of hospitality and can create a welcoming environment where individuals feel a sense of belonging and are encouraged to express their true selves.

The implications of hospitality in Mount View community

One of the primary calls upon the church is to create this 'free and fearless space' where 'our kindness and generosity can be converted into hospitality', and an enjoyable safe space like at MVMC, where the church may fulfil its vocation by actively engaging in building friendship with believers in their own neighbourhoods and/or workplaces. They can educate themselves about where refugees are resettled and pursue intentional relationships with them, and look for ways to intentionally reintegrate and welcome the formerly incarcerated into one's church and community:

Even among Christians, many of the current discussions about poverty and welfare, inclusion and diversity, scarcity and distribution, are conducted without the benefit of any coherent theological framework. Often, the result is that our stands on complex social and public policy concerns are little affected by our deepest Christian values and commitments. Hospitality as a framework provides a bridge which connect our theology with daily life concerns. (Karrir 2006:26)

Few Christians today understand that hospitality to strangers and to the marginalised is a constituent component of their

faith. This study compulsorily argues that hospitality to strangers is not an optional practice for Christians. The biblical texts consistently speak of the identity and vocation of Christians as those who have experienced God's hospitality whereby all of us are welcome into God's family. This event was a ground where the MVMC leadership has demonstrated a sense of a hospitable value by the simple fact of thinking yearly for those who are lonely or could not have a family member to speak to or share a meal with during Christmas, and so organised for them a belated Christmas dinner without any restriction. The moment was interactive, an uplifting organised event in which I felt the love, happiness and inclusiveness when entering that Church hall. Through my observation, that event was not only Christian, or even Methodists only, but a diverse presence from different parts of the community and leadership family members from different spectrums. That was the first experience of my children arriving from France in the UK. Some of them were our friends from the St Paul's Anglican church and others from the rest of the churches for which I am ministering. It was indeed a good and appealing experience of unbiased or dispassionate hospitality in which God's love was expressed unconditionally and inclusively.

Conclusion

In a pastoral context, dispassionate hospitality, as a Christian virtue, embodies selfless love, compassion and acceptance towards others, reflecting the teachings of Jesus Christ. This practice fosters community, healing and reconciliation, showcasing God's unconditional love. By embracing dispassionate hospitality, pastors create a nurturing environment where individuals feel supported in their spiritual journey. This value shapes Christian interactions, emphasising empathy, compassion and acceptance in counselling relationships, challenging traditional clinical approaches. Integrating dispassionate hospitality principles into counselling enhances a holistic, client-centred approach, prioritising emotional and spiritual well-being. This framework underscores the interconnectedness of faith, spirituality and mental health, promoting a non-judgemental space for individuals to seek support.

By recognising the inherent worth of each individual as a reflection of divine love, counsellors can establish a safe and non-judgemental environment for clients to explore their innermost thoughts and emotions. This approach builds trust, facilitates healing and supports profound personal growth. The study of dispassionate hospitality as a Christian value enhances counselling by providing a spiritually informed perspective that respects the complexity of human experience and the unity of mind, body and spirit. Integrating these principles into practice can improve therapeutic outcomes and promote overall well-being. Further research on this topic could promote the global adoption of dispassionate hospitality as a Christian value.

Acknowledgements

The author thanks his colleague Dr Jacob Mokhutso for their support. Prof Frances Young for her time to proofreading this article. Mrs Pauline Garrat for her support to proofreading this article. The author would also like to thank Fiona Champion for her support, as well as his family for their moral support.

Competing interests

The author declares that they have no financial or personal relationship(s) that may have inappropriately influenced them in writing this article.

Author's contributions

M.C.K. declares that they are the sole author of this research article.

Ethical considerations

This article does not contain any studies involving human participants performed by the author.

Funding information

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial or not-for-profit sectors.

Data availability

Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no new data were created or analysed in this study.

Disclaimer

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and are the product of professional research. It does not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of any affiliated institution, funder, agency or that of the publisher. The author is responsible for this article's results, findings and content.

References

- Alflen, C. 2008, 'Gastvrijheid in de zorg: management zorgt voor hét verschil', viewed n.d., from <https://www.yumpu.com/nl/document/read/31365095/lees-het-volledige-artikel-facto-magazine>.
- Anderson, D.W., 2011, 'Hospitable classrooms: Biblical hospitality and inclusive education', *Journal of Education and Christian Belief* 15(1), 13–27. <https://doi.org/10.1177/205699711101500103>
- Barth, K., 1936, *Church dogmatics*, T&T Clark, Edinburgh.
- Byrne, B., 2000, *The hospitality of God: A reading of Luke's Gospel*, The Liturgic Press, Collegeville, MN.
- Chukwu, C.N., 1995, *Introduction to philosophy in an African perspective*, Zapf Chancery, Eldoret, p. 301ff.
- Dickson, K.A., 1984, 'Theology in Africa', in J.S. Mbiti (ed.), *African religions and philosophy*, p. 83, Orbis books, Ossining, NY.
- Echema, A., 1995, *Corporate personality in Igbo Society and the Sacrament of Reconciliation*, p. 35, Peter Lang, Frankfurt am Main.
- Gade, D.W. 2012, 'Cultural geography and the inner dimensions of the quest for knowledge', *Journal of Cultural Geography* 29(3), 337–358. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08873631.2012.726449>
- Haty, B., 2016, *Echoes of scripture in the Gospels*, Baylor University Press, Waco, TX, viewed n.d., from [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/ubuntu_\(ideology\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/ubuntu_(ideology)).

- Hays, B., 2016, 'Dark hospitality: Hotels as places for the end of life', *Hospitality & Society* 5(02-03), 233–248. https://doi.org/10.1386/hosp.5.2-3.233_7
- Jipp, J.W., 2013, *My divine visitation and hospitality to strangers in Luke-Acts an interpretation of the Malta Episode in Acts 28:1–10*, pp. 153–182, Brill, Leiden.
- Karrir, R.J., 2006, *Eating your way through Luke's Gospel*, Liturgical Press, Collegeville, MN.
- Mbiti, J.S., 1970, *African religions and philosophy*, pp. 1–2, Pearson Education, London.
- Moila, M.P., 2002, *Challenging Issues in African Christianity*, p. 1, CB Powell Bible Centre, Pretoria.
- Nouwen, H., 1986, *Reaching out. The three movements in the spiritual Life*, Doubleday, New York, NY.
- Oduyoye, M.A., 2001, *Introducing African women's theology*, Sheffield Academic Press, Sheffield.
- Olikenyi, G.I., 2001, *African hospitality: A model for the communication of the Gospel in the African Cultural context*, p. 102, Steylerverlag, Nettetal.
- Pitre, B., 2015, *Jesus and the last supper*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI.
- Poovan, N., Du Toit, M.K. & Engelbrecht, A.S., 2006, 'The effect of the social values of ubuntu on team effectiveness', *South African Journal of Business Management* 37(3), 17–27. <https://doi.org/10.4102/sajbm.v37i3.604>
- Rowe, C.K., 2006, *Earlier narrative Christology: The Lord in the Gospel of Luke*, pp. 78–82, Waler de Gruyter GmbH&Co. KG, Berlin.
- Sihombing, B., 2013, 'Hospitality and Indonesian migrant workers', *Mission Studies* 30(2), 162–180. <https://doi.org/10.1163/15733831-12341280>
- Stockman, R., 2008, *Pro Deo. De geschiedenis van de christelijke gezondheidszorg*, Davidsfonds, Leuven.
- Stockman, R., 2013, *Leiderschap met spirit. Management met een menselijk gelaat*, Lannoo, Bucharest.
- Stockman, R., 2016, *Brothers of charity: Hospitality as a community of Vincentian heritage*, viewed n.d., from <https://via.library.depaul.edu/vhj/vol33/iss1/7/>.
- Tutu, N., 1989, *The words of Desmond Tutu*, Hodder and Stoughton, London.
- Vijver, H., 1996, *Ethiek van de gastvrijheid: Een bedrijfsethiek voor de dienstverlening*, Van Gorcum, Assen.
- Vijver, H., 1996, *Ethiek van de gastvrijheid. Een bedrijfsethiek voor de dienstverlening*, Van Gorcum, Assen.