

KINDS OF SPACES¹



I am invited into a home in Ottawa, Canada, 2017

More than dinner and a bed for the night

Nouwen's recognition of hospitality as making space for others encourages us to wonder, what kinds of spaces might be created.

1. The kind of space that may first come to mind is **physical space** - like when we invite people into our homes, opening the front door to welcome them inside.

Physical hospitality is more than welcoming others into our own physical space. It also relates to architecture. It may also refer to the way we arrange furniture - how open the space is. If the guest is asked to sit down on a seat a large distance from the host, what does that say to the guest? If we want participative conversation, a space with seats in rows facing one direction, like a church, will defeat that purpose.

¹ Edited extract from Geoff Boyce, *Radical Hospitality - space for human flourishing in a complex world* (2018) pp 26-28.

Physical space also relates to inter-personal space. If a host invades the personal space of a guest by approaching very close, face-to-face, how safe does the guest feel?

We might also consider how we are physically hospitable to ourselves. The lovely room in the photo above has big windows overlooking a beautiful garden. The central light, consisting of strips of paper with words and symbols, is a favourite of the hosts. They feel good in this room. And so do I!

2. **Social space** creates openings for social connection.

Rather than being the centre of attention, social hospitality introduces people to each other in ways that create space for their conversations rather than ours. Social hospitality is often offered over a meal or when host and guest are doing something in common together. Joint activity, like washing dishes together, can be an indirect act of social hospitality. It creates space by placing attention on something external, taking the pressure off the need, as the stranger, to socially 'perform'. It creates a friendly social space for the other to be themselves.

3. **Intellectual space** for the other means putting on hold one's own ideas to entertain² the ideas of the other.

It means not correcting the other in a reactive way or coming to quick judgements or overcoming the ideas of the other to prove my own point, but allowing the other the space for freedom to think their own thoughts and express them unconditionally.

4. **Emotional hospitality** creates space for feelings to be expressed and affirmed.

It allows the other to explore their feelings – a vital aspect of pastoral care and the nurture of self-understanding. Emotional hospitality means validating even what may be considered negative feelings. Listening for, discerning and affirming the legitimacy of feelings is such an important skill and practice. Helping the other to identify and name those feelings can be one of the most helpful ways of empowering others.

² The word 'entertain' comes from two old words - 'inter', meaning 'between', and 'twain' meaning 'two'. So, it literally means being between two worlds. Going to a theatre for entertainment means that you willingly allow yourself to sit between the world you live in every day and a new world being presented to you. Imagination connects the two worlds to make sense of them for yourself. If you can't make that sense, you likely won't like the experience! An entertainer's job is to present to you a different world than your own, but one you can connect with, stimulating your imagination and often challenging your values.

5. **Spiritual hospitality** creates space for different expressions of the sacred to be entertained and have their own valid life.³

In short, radical hospitality creates space for life beyond our own worlds. Radical Hospitality is antithetical to dominance. It de-centres space to include and allow participation by others. This has big implications for how we understand leadership. Hospitable space allows the other to 'be'; it creates an environment for the other to grow in their being. It is therefore a practice unlikely to be welcomed by those intent on controlling or excluding others. It will be thought to be too risky by those who have adopted a lifestyle of determined self-interest and self-protection; and a seemingly impossible and irrelevant practice for those who are addicted to the thrill of conflict.

This was the major discovery we chaplains of different faiths made as we had our weekly lunches together at Flinders University. It was the clue that helped us resolve how we might go about diffusing religious tensions on campus and provide an alternative to overcome religious competitiveness. It started with us becoming hospitable to each other.

In my experience, Radical Hospitality gives hope for us to not only accept diversity but to celebrate it. And not feel threatened by those who are different from us.

The most important question we ask ourselves as stranger or guest is:

Do I feel safe and comfortable here?

Good things happen when the answer is 'yes'. And invariably that 'yes' results from the kind of radical hospitality practice hinted at in the various ways described above.

³ ²⁸ This relates to Laloux's Paradigm 5, 'Soulful Organisation'- a higher purpose. **Geoff Boyce**, *Radical Hospitality - space for human flourishing in a complex world* (2018) p 52