

At-homeness, placemaking, and holy anticipation: Christian hospitality in educational practice

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Amid global and local crises of extremism and polarization, how might Christian educators cultivate learning environments that facilitate open inquiry and promote authentic engagement across difference? In this integrative, interdisciplinary article, I propose that New Testament hospitality—with its universal and unconditional welcome, humbling and dignifying dynamic, and anticipation of divine presence and blessing—lays the theological groundwork for Christians to receive those unlike themselves with humility and generosity. Focusing on the role of teachers, I explain how themes from Christian hospitality—of at-homeness, placemaking, and holy anticipation of sacred encounter—might be realized through proven educational practices and mindsets. First, I insist that before Christian educators can extend and model welcome in the classroom, they must be willing to learn how to be “at home” with themselves before God. Drawing from interpersonal neurobiology and culturally responsive teaching, I explain how teachers might explore and embrace their own “situatedness” within their own bodies and minds, and within the formative cultures, histories, and contexts that shape their educational approaches. Next, I examine how teachers can make space for learners to actively contribute to the educational exchange by exercising diverse gifts and expressing divergent views. I show how Marshall Rosenberg’s nonviolent communication theory offers a common language for understanding and responding to the life-giving needs and values that underlie conflicting perspectives. Finally, I demonstrate how Carol Dweck’s growth mindset helps teachers to experience even difficult classroom interactions as sacred encounters in which God is present and at work.

Like many in our international guild, I am alarmed by the multiple crises of extremism and polarization in communities both local and global. Extremism and polarization flourish when we lack natural opportunities to interact and pursue shared goals with those unlike ourselves on a day-to-day basis. Or, when given the opportunity, as in a classroom setting, we simply do not trust each other enough to speak openly and engage meaningfully. It then becomes easy to suspect and judge one another, not only as holding “wrong” views,” but also as being “bad” people—

people who must be moronic, malicious, or immoral somehow.

Today, most US institutions of higher learning advertise a commitment to diversity, recognizing that a variety of views in the classroom can spur and enrich learning, at least in theory. Yet, diversity alone does not guarantee the openness and authentic engagement needed for mutual learning. What can Christian educators do about this? How can we cultivate learning environments that encourage open inquiry? How can we promote authentic engagement across difference?





In this integrative, interdisciplinary article, I propose that New Testament hospitality—with its universal and unconditional welcome, humbling and dignifying dynamic, and anticipation of divine presence and blessing—lays the theological groundwork for Christians to receive those unlike themselves with humility and generosity. Focusing on the role of teachers, I then explain how themes from Christian hospitality—of at-homeness, place-making, and holy anticipation of sacred encounter—might be realized through proven educational practices and mindsets.

On Christian Hospitality

Universal and Unconditional Welcome

New Testament hospitality is set apart by its universal and unconditional welcome (Pohl 1999, Jipp 2017). The Roman Empire of Jesus' times had its own share of sociocultural, political, and religious diversity—and with that, conflict. In that context, a distinguishing mark of the early church was its welcome in Jesus' name to all people, regardless of gender, ethnicity, class, or other markers of social status (Gal. 3:28, Col. 3:11). Against hierarchy, prejudice, and exclusion, early Christians insisted on welcoming one another, as Christ had welcomed them, without regard for rank or merit (Rom. 15:7).

Whereas classical hospitality followed a *quid pro quo* logic, Christian hospitality extended generous and gracious welcome even to those who could not repay or reciprocate (Lk. 14:12-14, Pohl 1999, Jipp 2017). Christian hospitality thus testified to God's unconditional love, which reaches across all social divisions and cultural barriers to embrace those deemed undeserving. Christine Pohl points out that early church leaders—such as John Chrysostom, Lactantius, and Jerome—saw hospitability as “a significant context for transcending status boundaries and for working through issues of respect and recognition” (1999, 19). This radical, equalizing welcome was further spurred by the notion that hospitality rendered unto strangers is rendered unto Christ (Matt. 25:31-46). As Benedict of Nursia put forth in his sixth century *Rule*, Christ's self-identification with the stranger in Matthew 25 means that Christians are to show hospitality to all, treating even the lowliest guest with utmost care and respect, as though welcoming Christ himself (Benedict 2008, 78).

The Christian duty to welcome and care for “the least of these” also flows from a long Jewish tradition underpinning Israel's responsibility before God for foreigners, widows and orphans, and the poor.¹ As the descendants of Abraham, called out of Ur into an unknown territory, the ancient Israelites understood themselves as the offspring of a nomad, strangers in Egypt, sojourners in the wilderness, and stewards of God's land. Like guests, they depended on God's provision and protection at every turn. As hosts, they in turn recognized their accountability to God for the strangers among them (Pohl 1999, 16). As God commanded them, “You shall not oppress a resident alien; you know the heart of an alien, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt” (Ex. 23:9). Following, yet going beyond, this ancient tradition of acknowledging God's special concern for vulnerable outsiders, Christian hospitality extends universal and unconditional welcome, not only to those disregarded as poor and needy, but also to those condemned as unclean and sinful, avowing that true worth and righteousness come from Christ (1 Cor. 6:11).

Humbling and Dignifying Dynamic

Israel's experience as both guest and host, under God's providential care and righteous judgment, prefigures another marker of New Testament hospitality: the blurring of host and guest roles, which leads to a humbling and dignifying dynamic within the hospitable exchange. Hosts are not always in the position of giving, nor are guests permanently in the posture of receiving. Christian hospitality understands the distinction between hosts and guests as fluid and ambiguous.

This permeability between hosts and guests is observable in the original vocabulary used for these roles. In English, “hospitality” derives from the Latin root *hospes*, which means guest, host, or stranger (Hershberger 1999, 19). This mirrors the Greek word ξένος (*xenos*), which shares the same meanings. As John Koenig points out, ξένος (*xenos*) can refer not only to the stranger who receives welcome, but also to the stranger who offers welcome (1985, 8). Both guests and hosts are strangers to one another, brought into a special relationship with one another through the hospitable encounter.

1 E.g., Ex. 22:21-24, Deut. 27:19, Psa. 146:9, Prov. 14:31, Isa. 1:17, Jer. 22:3, Zech. 7:10, Mal. 3:5.



In the New Testament, the Greek word translated into English as “hospitality” is φιλοξενία (*philoxenia*), which literally means “the love of strangers” or, in Koenig’s rendering, “a delight in the whole guest-host relationship, [and] in the mysterious reversals and gains...which may take place” (1985, 8). In Romans 12:10, 13 and Hebrews 13:1-2, the exhortation toward φιλοξενία (*philoxenia*) is made alongside the exhortation toward φιλαδελφία (*philadelphia*), as in “brotherly love” or “mutual love.” This concomitance underscores the Christian vocation to universal love. Welcome in Christ’s name is to be extended not only inwardly toward one’s own kind of person, but also outwardly toward all kinds of people.

In Christian φιλοξενία (*philoxenia*), extending welcome and meeting needs go in all directions, from ξένος (*xenos*) to ξένος (*xenos*), in every sense of the word. Like the Samaritan woman at the well or Zacchaeus atop the sycamore, hosts themselves may end up receiving the water and the welcome (Jn. 4:1-42, Lk. 19:1-10). Or, like Peter at Cornelius’s house or Paul under Publius’s roof, guests may end up providing what is lacking and most needed for life (Acts 10:1-48, 28:1-10). The ambiguity and fluidity of these roles serve as a reminder that hosts also stand in positions of need and dependency, while guests, too, have their own indispensable contributions to offer.

Jesus’ followers recognized this humbling yet dignifying dynamic in Jesus’ own life. Throughout the New Testament, Jesus occupied both host and guest roles simultaneously. As host, Jesus offers welcome to all into God’s household through his redeeming and reconciling work on the cross (Jn. 1:12). In his earthly ministry, Jesus especially welcomed those whom society disregarded, such as children, persons with disabilities, sex workers, and tax collectors.² In the mystery of the eucharist, he nourishes all who hunger and thirst for righteousness with his own broken body and shed blood, through which he gives abundant and eternal life (Lk. 22:14-23, Jn. 6:35-59). In the eschaton, he presides as the bridegroom at the marriage supper of the lamb (Rev. 19:6-9). As guest, Jesus crossed an unfathomable distance to sojourn among us in a tent of flesh (Jn. 1:14). Born as an infant far from home and raised as a refugee in Egypt, he was often driven from place to place as the Son of Man with nowhere to lay his head (Lk. 2, Matt. 2:13-15, Lk. 9:58). Jesus relied frequent-

ly on others’ hospitality, dining often with tax collectors and conspicuous sinners (Matt. 9:11, Mk. 2:16, Lk. 5:30). In death, he rested in another man’s grave (Matt. 27:57-61). In glory, he stands at the door and knocks (Rev. 3:20).

Divine Presence and Blessing

Finally, early Christians recognized that God’s presence and blessing are often mysteriously revealed in the breaking of bread and sharing of fellowship.³ The mysterious experience of “entertaining angels unawares” pervades Scripture, famously in the stories of Abraham, Sarah, and the three strangers; of Elijah, the widow of Zarephath, and her replenishing jars of meal and oil; and of Elisha and the Shunammite who received a son and then check him back again from the dead (Heb. 13:2). Most significantly, on the way to Emmaus, two disciples recognized the risen Lord just as he broke bread with them (Lk. 24:13-35). Fittingly, the Greek verb, ξενίζω (*xenizō*), meaning “to receive or entertain a guest” can also mean “to surprise” (Koenig 1985, 8).

Especially in Homeric times (1200-800 BCE), the ancient Greeks also associated hospitality with theophany. Michele Hershberger notes that in the Greek epic tradition, the gods would don human disguises to visit unsuspecting hosts, bestowing glad tidings and generous gifts if welcomed (1999, 18). In Christian hospitality, though, there is a caveat about the timing of the anticipated reward. Offering hospitality in godly love is costly and, at times, thankless. Divine presence and blessing can be anticipated, but instant gratification is never promised. While teaching on hospitality to “the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind,” Jesus said, “And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you, for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous” (Lk. 14:13-14).⁴ Motivation for Christian hospitality is rooted not in the desire for earthly blessing, but rather in gratitude for the heavenly welcome we have already received from God in Christ (Rom. 15:7).

In sum, Christian hospitality is distinguished by its universal and unconditional welcome, humbling and dignifying character, and anticipation of divine presence and blessing. Taking these features as the

2 E.g., Mk. 10:14, 14:3; Matt. 9:10, 21:32; Lk. 7:34.

3 E.g., Gen. 18:1-15, 1 Kgs. 17:8-24, 2 Kgs. 4:8-37, Lk. 24:13-35, Heb. 13:2.

4 All Scripture references are from the New Revised Standard Version.



theological grounds for educational practice, how might Christian educators extend such hospitality in the classroom, especially in contexts facing extremism and polarization? First, I insist that before Christian educators can extend and model welcome in the classroom, they must be willing to learn how to be “at home” with themselves before God. Drawing from interpersonal neurobiology and culturally responsive teaching, I explain how teachers might explore and embrace their own “situatedness” within their own bodies and minds, and within the formative cultures, histories, and contexts that shape their educational approaches. Next, I examine how teachers can make space for learners to actively contribute to the educational exchange by exercising diverse gifts and expressing divergent views. I show how Marshall Rosenberg’s nonviolent communication theory offers a common language for understanding and responding to the life-giving needs and values that underlie conflicting perspectives. Finally, I demonstrate how Carol Dweck’s growth mindset helps teachers to experience even difficult classroom interactions as sacred encounters in which God is present and at work.

At-Homeness

As Christian educators, our welcome to students stems from our own experience of Christ’s welcome. Christ’s indiscriminate, unconditional welcome of us—while we were “strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world”—moves us to extend a gracious welcome to all students, especially those who are unlike ourselves in speech, thought, and being (Eph. 2:12b). Because Christ was willing to overcome the unimaginable distance between the holy God and sinful humanity, followers of Christ can venture to extend a welcoming hand across merely human chasms. Our welcome cannot presume to be unconditional and all-encompassing like that of Christ, but we can take concrete steps to ensure that the welcome we extend is wider and warmer than it would be otherwise.

One step is to learn to be “at home” with ourselves in God’s presence. Our capacity to be alone and at rest enables us to become genuinely receptive toward others. Henri Nouwen points out that if we cannot sit in solitude with ourselves before God, then our “crying loneliness” will make others into idols and ourselves into devils (Nouwen 1975, 119).

Moreover, our efforts to reach out will be excruciating and exhausting, as we exploit others for self-fulfillment, reaping anger, jealousy, anxious clinging, and insecurity, instead of freedom and love (Nouwen 1975, 30, 119). In contrast, being “at home” with ourselves in God’s presence enables a receptive solitude of heart that makes possible true fellowship and intimacy, as well as mutual learning.

Interpersonal Neurobiology (IPNB)

In Jesus’s command to love our neighbors as ourselves, we are reminded that tending to our own souls is not only a God-given responsibility, but also a gift to those we seek to love (Matt. 22:39). A chaotic, unkempt house left in ruins is no place to invite a guest. Likewise, we cannot welcome or listen attentively to our students without learning to be present with ourselves and attend to our own inner voices. It is not that our inner lives must be pristine, perfectly “swept and put in order” (Lk. 11:25). Rather, what matters is the willingness to be still before God amid our own mess and lack, lest we end up exploiting others, especially unconsciously, to fill the void or tame the chaos within. Interpersonal neurobiology (IPNB) offers insights into how we might develop a sense of at-homeness from within, so that we might offer welcome to others from a secure and open base.

Pioneered by Daniel Siegel, IPNB is an interdisciplinary field that understands the human mind to be “the embodied and relational, emergent self-organizing process that regulates the flow of energy and information” (Siegel 2018). IPNB’s goal is to promote integration, whereby the mind differentiates and links our embodied and relational experiences in ways that enable greater flexibility, adaptivity, coherence, energy, and stability (FACES) (Siegel 2018). Lived out, integration looks like compassion and openness toward oneself and others. It involves looking beyond external behavior to perceive and reflect on the inner world of one’s own self and of other selves. This capacity, which Siegel calls “mind-sight,” is a learned skill that can be developed and strengthened through practice.

Mindfulness training, for instance, can heighten our awareness of our own bodily sensations, our thoughts and feelings, and our sense of connectedness with others (Siegel 2010). In her book, *Your Resonant Self*, Sarah Peyton offers guided meditations, informed by IPNB, to bolster the mind’s capacity for empathy (2017). These exercises direct attention to



one's breathing and bodily states, while exploring, with gentle curiosity, the tone and content of one's inner voices, in order to develop self-compassion and self-understanding. As Christians, our trust in God's compassionate and thoroughgoing knowledge of our innermost being can motivate and sustain these efforts (Psa. 139:1-4, 145:8-9).

Narrative exercises that help us to tell the stories of our lives with others can also promote healthy integration. Autobiographic practices enable us to put our memories into context, make sense of our experiences, and better understand our intentions and instinctual reactions (Siegel 2010, 74–75, 171–173). As we learn to narrate and re-narrate our personal histories, especially from childhood, we gain critical distance, the capacity to differentiate ourselves from important others, and freedom to choose a different path from our current life trajectories. Most of all, we gain the confidence that we “make sense.” Siegel underscores that this experience of self-coherence is “essential to our well-being and happiness” (2010, 173). When we make sense to ourselves, especially after a courageous and strenuous process of searching, we can believe that others, including our students, also make sense, even if their beliefs and actions perplex us in the moment. By encouraging integration of our embodied, cognitive, and relational experiences, IPNB helps us to cultivate a non-anxious and open-hearted presence with ourselves and toward others.

Culturally Responsive Teaching

Culturally responsive teaching helps us recognize that being “at home” with ourselves before God also means reckoning with the wider ecology of our lives. If interpersonal neurobiology encourages integration of our embodied, cognitive, and relational experiences so we “make sense” to ourselves, then culturally responsive teaching promotes integration of the broader historical, contextual, and cultural influences in our lives so we can make sense of our teaching preferences and approaches. The perspectives and strategies we favor and employ in our teaching do not arise from a neutral ether. Rather, they stem from the larger cultures, histories, and social systems that shape our lives.

Sharlene Cochrane and her colleagues at Lesley University's Cultural Literacy Curriculum Institute emphasize that teachers need to gain cultural awareness not only of their students' backgrounds, but also of their own (Cochrane et al. 2017). By explor-

ing our own cultural heritages, family histories, and social contexts, we as Christian educators can examine how these distinctive legacies affect the ways in which we experience the world, engage in theological reflection, practice our faith, and approach teaching.

We learn to be “at home” with ourselves, in the contexts and circumstances God has placed us in, by examining our own background and history, working through the baggage, understanding our place in our community, and appreciating the values and strengths of our heritage (Cochrane et al. 2017). As suggested by Meenakshi Chhabra, Sharlene Cochrane, and Deborah Wright, exercises for spurring self-reflection could be as simple as recalling times when we have experienced or witnessed infringements or affirmations of dignity, exploring the story behind our names, tracing three generations of women in our families, or using poetic expression (e.g., drawing from George Ella Lyon's “Where I'm From”) to contemplate the people, places, sights, sounds, smells, foods, artifacts, and activities that root our sense of self (Cochrane et al. 2017, 22, 47, 87–94).

In all these efforts to become more settled and “at home” with ourselves—both within the idiosyncratic contexts of our embodied, relational minds and within the larger sociocultural contexts of our communities—we can be encouraged in knowing that we do not dwell alone. When we welcome Christ, who first welcomed us, to dwell in our hearts through faith, our sense of at-homeness can be “rooted and grounded in love” (Eph. 3:17). From that inner place, where we dwell at peace with ourselves before God, our welcome to others can be extended as a gift, and not imposed as a burden.

Placemaking

Christian hospitality involves not only extending welcome, but also preparing a suitable place for guests to be welcomed into—a place where hosts understand that they also stand in need of listening and learning, and where guests, too, are empowered to speak and contribute. Commonly used by architects and city planners, placemaking refers to the design of public spaces in ways that maximize the community's assets, local flavor, and potential—all with the goal of promoting human wellbeing. To that end, placemaking requires listening to local residents, and understanding what matters to them



and what would best serve their needs (Teder 2019). Likewise, hospitality in the classroom is an act of co-creation between hosts and guests, between teacher and learners.

Cultivating a learning environment is like place-making. It involves making space for the other's choice and voice. John H. Westerhoff emphasizes the importance of the learning environment in conveying welcome (2012). The physical space of the classroom is part of the implicit or hidden curriculum, which may matter even more than the explicit curriculum of what is taught (Westerhoff 2012, 15). However, the implicit curriculum involves more than physical space. It encompasses experiences, practices, interactions, and atmosphere (Westerhoff 2012, 77, 95).

One educational practice that accords with hospitable placemaking is the offering of differentiated assessment options, in recognition of students' diverse gifts and vocational goals. Instead of writing a traditional research paper, for instance, some students may demonstrate their learning more effectively by designing a digital media project in the form of blog posts, podcast episodes, a TED talk, or a short film. Others may find it useful to prepare a sermon or curriculum unit using course materials. Still others may enjoy creating artwork, music, poetry, or choreography, accompanied by a reflection. Those preparing job applications may also value the opportunity to sit for a mock interview with the teacher and to verbally articulate their insights. By empowering students to exercise agency in how they demonstrate their learning, teachers make space for variously talented students to shine.

Nonviolent Communication (NVC)

In addition to empowering students to exercise diverse gifts, hospitable placemaking in the classroom involves equipping students to express divergent views. One way that Christian educators can make space for constructive disagreement is by teaching and practicing Marshall Rosenberg's nonviolent communication (NVC). NVC offers a shared language for identifying and responding to the needs and values that underlie conflicting perspectives. Central to the theory is the insight that negative feelings arise from unmet needs, which are, by definition, universal and life-giving (Rosenberg 2015). Connected to this insight is the insistence that needs do not contradict inherently; rather, the source of conflicts lies in the flawed strategies employed to

meet different needs. When parties in conflict are able to clarify the needs and values at stake for each side, then unhelpful strategies can be abandoned more easily and better strategies forged cooperatively in their place.

Rosenberg recounts an experience that illustrates the stalemate that ensues when parties in conflict stay enmeshed in anger without comprehending the unmet needs in play:

I was once invited to Southern California to mediate between some landowners and migrant farm workers whose conflicts had grown increasingly hostile and violent. I began the meeting by asking these two questions: "What is it that you are each needing? And what would you like to request of the other in relation to these needs?" "The problem is that these people are racist!" shouted a farm worker. "The problem is that these people don't respect law and order!" shouted a landowner even more loudly. As is often the case, these groups were more skilled in analyzing the perceived wrongness of others than in clearly expressing their own needs (2015, 53).

Needs cannot be met if we do not know what they are. NVC trains us to identify these needs, take responsibility for them, and make concrete and doable requests of one another in response.

Earlier, I explained that Christian hospitality is characterized by a simultaneously humbling and dignifying dynamic, in which hosts find themselves also in need and guests likewise discover their capacity for meeting another's need. Both hosts and guests, both teachers and students, experience need and can help meet needs. As we think back to conflicts in the classroom, how might our perceptions change if we recognize their source in unmet needs, possibly for acknowledgement (understanding, respect, consideration, appreciation), connection (inclusion, belonging, support), freedom or ease (choice, order, fairness, trust, competence), or meaning (integrity, inspiration, contribution)?

NVC relies on a simple yet disciplined four-step process through which teachers and students can: (1) observe factually the concrete actions affecting their wellbeing; (2) identify the feelings that arise in relation to the observed actions; (3) identify the needs or values driving those feelings; and (4) request clear, concrete, and doable actions that would enrich one another's lives (Rosenberg 2015, 7). In tense and polarized environments, the key is to identify and take responsibility for the unmet needs at play, so that parties in conflict can seek workable strategies through compromise and collaboration, "without criticizing, analyzing, blaming, or diag-



nosing others” (Rosenberg 2015, 67). Strategies that fail to account for core needs on all sides of a conflict only prove to be unjust strategies in need of revision.

Practical theologians like Deborah van Deusen Hunsinger and Theresa Latini remind us that our needs are only fully and ultimately met by God in Christ, but that God nonetheless invites us to participate in meeting one another’s needs, however incompletely and tentatively (Hunsinger et al. 2013). By tracing negative feelings to unmet needs, teachers and students alike can learn to view these feelings with patient compassion, taking responsibility for them instead of blaming others, and exploring them with curiosity instead of repressing them. This not only inspires empathy toward others, but also enables us to collaborate more effectively with them to meet each other’s needs in creative and mutually satisfying ways, even as we continually bring what remains unfulfilled to God in prayer.

Holy Anticipation

Finally, as we seek to be “at home” with ourselves before God, to invite different expressions of talent, and to make space for healthy dissent without abandoning compassion and respect, we can trust that God is at work in these efforts. When we welcome others as Christ has welcomed us, we can anticipate divine presence and blessing in our acts of hospitality, however flawed and faltering.

The tasks involved are difficult and risky. We make mistakes and experience failure even when we, with the best of intentions, seek earnestly to grow comfortable in our own minds and bodies, negotiate our social and cultural backgrounds, design valuable learning opportunities for variously gifted students, and recognize and respond to the needs and values underlying divergent viewpoints.

Carol Dweck’s growth mindset can help us to persevere in these fraught and arduous labors. In her work on learning mindsets, Dweck teaches that our intellectual, relational, moral, and motivational capacities are not fixed. Rather, these are capable of growth throughout our lives, thanks to the neuroplasticity of our brains (Dweck 2016). Our mindsets—or our perceptions of our own abilities—affect our achievement and resilience, for better or for worse.

According to Dweck, the fixed mindset is the belief that our capacities are genetically determined or “carved in stone” (2016, 6). This generates “an ur-

gency to prove yourself over and over” (Dweck 2016, 6). In contrast, the growth mindset is the belief that our capacities can be cultivated through strategic effort and help from others (Dweck 2016, 7). “Although people may differ in every which way—in their initial talents and aptitudes, interests, or temperaments,” says Dweck, “everyone can change and grow through application and experience” (2010, 6).

To cultivate a growth mindset, Dweck recommends focusing on the process that leads to learning, rather than on the outcome alone. This requires effort, as well as adaptive strategies and wise use of resources. The goal is to master new knowledge and skills, in order to build competence, rather than to merely perform for extrinsic rewards. Dweck explains that those with a growth mindset improve themselves by taking risks and embracing challenges, persevering through obstacles or setbacks, applying strategic effort, reflecting on choices and consequences, learning from criticism and failure, and seeking insights and inspiration from others’ successes (Dweck 2016, 263). Those with a growth mindset focus on learning, whereas those with a fixed mindset focus on looking good. Dweck acknowledges that we cannot fully rid ourselves of our fixed mindset. However, we can look out for “fixed mindset” triggers and keep working through them. These triggers may include anxiety or a sense of incompetence, avoidant behavior like procrastination, the urge to make excuses or react defensively against critical feedback, and envy toward excellent others (Dweck 2016, 254–263).

The growth mindset is good news for Christian educators. It helps us to accept our limitations, face our failures, and press on toward our goal of extending and modeling hospitality to counteract extremism and polarization in our society. The process of learning, testing, and developing facility and finesse in new schemata and skills—interpersonal neurobiology, culturally responsive teaching, nonviolent communication, even the growth mindset itself—requires much and may amount to little, especially at first. Students may not respond the way we expect. Colleagues and administrators may not share our commitment or support our efforts. Through it all, a growth mindset can help us to focus on doing our part while entrusting the rest to God who ultimately “gives the growth” (1 Cor. 3:6). We persevere, knowing from the testimony of Scripture that because God has first shown hospitality to us in Christ and has called us to welcome one another in Jesus’



name, we can anticipate divine presence and blessing as we answer that call.

Sustaining Hospitality

As Paul enjoined the believers in Rome, “Welcome one another, therefore, just as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God” (Rom. 15:7). As Christian educators, our welcome to students not only stems from, but also relies on Christ’s welcome to us. In the same letter, Paul points out that our very capacity to love comes from God, for “God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us” (Rom. 5:5b). We extend hospitality only insofar as we experience God’s hospitality. Just as Jesus asked Peter to feed his lambs only after he himself had fed Peter breakfast that morning on the shore of Tiberias, Christian hospitality is sustained by a continual receiving from and receiving of Christ, the ultimate host-guest who nourishes souls with his word, gives rest to the weary and heavy-laden, and comes to dwell with us through his Spirit (Matt. 4:4, 11:28; Rom. 8:9). May Jesus find welcome in our lives and in our classrooms, and may we recognize him in the faces of the students we welcome in his name.

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