



# ST. JOHN'S CHURCH

SAVANNAH

*Worship in the Anglican Tradition*

## Ministry with Youth - Were We Meant to Live Life Alone?

The second pillar of ministry for the Youth of St. John's is hospitality.

### **The Need for Hospitality**

In the film *About a Boy* the main character Will (Hugh Grant) opens by saying, "In my opinion, all men are islands. And what's more, now's the time to be one. This is an island age. A hundred years ago, you had to depend on other people. No one had TV or CDs or DVDs or videos or home espresso makers. Actually, they didn't have anything cool. Whereas now, you see...you can make yourself a little island paradise."

Henry David Thoreau famously remarked, "The mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation." This desperation is often coupled with isolation. Modern society has told us that we need to be "unique individuals" who make our own way in the world. Even though we live in neighborhoods, attend schools, jobs, and even church - we still lack meaningful connection with others. But, as John Donne noted, no man (or woman) is an island.

### **What is Hospitality?**

How do we stop living as islands? Hospitality. Hospitality is a word that evokes a host of images: an invitation, a set table, a cold drink. But what does it mean for the church, and youth ministry, to show hospitality? Pastor Tony Merida gives us a good summary, "In many ways [ministry] is about learning to practice hospitality well. It's about meeting, welcoming, listening to, and loving people." Hospitality is so essential to ministry in the church. St. Paul lists it as a requirement for pastoral ministry in two epistles.

### **God's Hospitality**

The book of Revelation ends with an invitation. The Spirit and the Bride say, "Come." And let the one who hears say, "Come." And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who desires take the water of life without price. It is God the Father who invites all into his Kingdom through the Son in the Church (his Bride) by the Spirit. God says to all, "Come!" In the same way, the Church invites others to share in God's hospitality by saying, "Come!" The free gift of salvation and life in the Kingdom is a drink of fresh water available to all.

Hospitality reveals the character of God and is a facet of the gospel. The entire narrative of the Bible could be summarized as one of God's hospitality to men and women created in his image, and by extension, their hospitality to others. Bible scholar Joshua Jipp writes, "The God of the Christian Scriptures is a God of hospitality, a God who extends hospitality to his people and who requires that his people embody hospitality to others."

### **Our Hospitality**

Youth, just like all of us, are looking for a place to belong. We desire to create a culture of meeting, welcoming, listening to, and loving students within the Youth of St. John's. Building on the thought of pastor Merida, we desire to "expand our guest list" by including all youth in activities even if they cannot pay, because God welcomed us into his family when we had nothing to offer. We desire to emphasize "warmth

over wow” by moving toward connection with youth instead of trying to impress them because God meets us where we are in Christ. We desire to open our homes to youth since we know our homes are gifts and not merely possessions because we are those who have generously received from God. And lastly, we desire to create a culture that greets warmly, engages sincerely, and says goodbye thoughtfully. Paul’s letters set an example for this pattern, always ending on a note of peace and blessing.

It is easy to view ourselves as only the giver and never the receiver of hospitality. Part of what God calls us to is learning to receive as well as give hospitality because all of life is a gift of grace.

May St. John’s Church and the Youth of St. John’s be known as a place of hospitality. It may mean meeting and welcoming people who do not look like us or vote differently than we do, all because we desire to follow Jesus faithfully and to show hospitality to others, just as God has shown hospitality to us.