

*The Marquand Reader is the weekly newsletter of the daily
ecumenical worship program in Marquand Chapel*

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On the Place of Hospitality in Ecumenical Worship – *continued*

As discussed in the last two Readers, hospitality is one of the five key principles underlying the daily ecumenical worship program. Where past *Readers* have looked at why this is so, and how it is cultivated through our seating and vesting, this *Reader* will consider the role of the narthex.

Most churches have a narthex of some sort or other, although in some places, borrowing names from the wider culture, it is referred to as the “entrance hall”, “lobby” or “foyer”. Narthexes are liturgical spaces. They mark the space between the street and the assembly gathered to worship God, and they mark the point between the ordinary time of the everyday and the eschatological time of Christian worship. As such, by architecturally hosting changes in time and space, they host the coming in and the going out of the people, on their way to, and from, their liturgical work. A narthex is thus a space that hosts profound transitions. It therefore conditions the ways in which a community is formed to do both its work of worship (going in) and its work in the world (going out).

Think of narthexes you have known. There is probably a great variety among them. Just thinking of the churches in the neighborhood of YDS, the variety is astounding. This morning, passing one local church, the doors from the street to the narthex were wide open, such that one could see warm colors inside and the nave beyond and a man sat on the stone threshold of street and narthex playing a tin whistle. Going up the steps to another local church, the narthex was large and wide, with six different doors (all closed) to the sanctuary beyond; between each set of doors was a table, each holding lots of pamphlets and other printed matter, much of it campaigning against abortion. Yet another had a tiny narthex, teeming with children running in and out of the various half-open doors and lots of parents doing double-duty minding children and verbally

welcoming newcomers: there were so many human beings in the narthex, I did not notice whether there was anything on the walls.

Each of these narthexes expresses something of the ecclesiology of the community that is gathered beyond it. The first literally drew you in, with the sound of the music (and its accessibility – like a street musician’s) and the sight of open doors and warm colors right beyond its source. It said: this is a church that is artistic, warm and reaching out. The second told you what was important to the church and the sorts of commitments that were expected of those who chose to open the second set of doors: it was clear about expectations and responsibilities. It said: you need a high level of pre-existing commitment to come into this church (if only so you know to open the doors, but, also, regarding ethical issues). The third was packed with people literally saying “welcome” but also showing that people of all ages and backgrounds were indeed welcome: these people looked utterly at home, and lived that in a way oriented entirely to inviting others into it. It said: we are a big, inclusive family and our emphasis is on people and on being together.

In Marquand, as in all three local churches, our narthex gives the first clue to how the worship beyond will host those who come to it in order to form them as part of God’s church on earth. In keeping with our ecumenical pattern of having a different leader each day lead us by drawing on their own tradition but opening it up to invite our participation in it with them, the narthex often has a different element in it each morning. This element is particular to the worship tradition or style of the worship into which we are being invited inside the sanctuary. It might be culture-specific, denomination-specific or tradition-specific symbols (such as a crucifix, icon, pamphlet, prayer card or action-sign-up sheet) or it might be the way people are dressed (eg: wearing gloves, or a stole), or it might be gestures that minister to congregation at this very point of threshold, as when the artist Aileen Lambert held holy water for the community in her cupped hands all one week in September.

However, as well as meeting in our difference, we also constantly discern and celebrate that which we have in common and this is used in the narthex on a daily basis with greatly regularity – because of its power to draw us together as One, in preparation for worshipping across the bounds of apparent difference. Thus, the most common thing we place in the narthex is a bowl of water, water being for many people here the core Christian thing that we share in common, and, by reminding us of baptism it reminds us of our the commonality that exists under all else that might differ between us or even divide us. Other key Christian things are also used: the Bible,

flowers or other reminders of the bounty of creation, or oil to perfume the space and with which to anoint one another.

Other things are also used: newspapers to prompt political thought, works of art, and there is always a poem in the narthex too. (The poem that is read each week in sung morning prayer is put in the narthex for the week that follows, for those who wish to use it for a moment's contemplation). We are blessed with a narthex big enough to hold seats, and so the narthex is for us a gathering space where people can rest a while, or sit and chat with one another.

Understanding the narthex as liturgical space, a space specifically ministering to the daily transitions of our lives, helps us understand the hospitality implicit in all conversations that happen in this place, and perhaps to tune into their sacredness.

One important thing has been missing from the narthex so far this semester.....

Food Basket Returns: Please Bring Food This Friday

Last year, Acting Dean of the Chapel Gordon Lathrop initiated the practice of bringing food to Eucharist. We revive it this week, for the reasons he wrote about in the *Reader* on 28th Oct 08:

“Since the earliest times of the Christian churches, coming together for worship has also grown to be associated with gathering food to be given away to those who are hungry. The gospel tradition contains at least two variants of the story of Jesus feeding a multitude with free food, telling the disciples “You give them something to eat” (Mark 6:36). Paul, in the same letter in which he urged the Corinthian Christians to stop practicing the Lord’s Supper as a full feast for the privileged that excluded the hungry (1 Cor. 11:21-22), also called for a collection for people in need to be held on the first day of every week (1 Cor. 16:1-2). The regular Christian Sunday gathering in Rome that was described by Justin in about 150 CE, in his First Apology – a gathering for scripture, preaching, prayer and eucharist – also included the opportunity for people with means to contribute to a collection of food or money that was to be distributed to anybody in need in the city. And the early churches of the Reformation – beginning with Bucer’s work in Strasburg – also recovered this practice, always associating an open community chest, to which one could contribute, with the celebration of the Lord’s Supper.

We want to recover something of this old practice here.

In the next days you will see baskets appearing at the door to Marquand Chapel. Please be free to bring a gift of non-perishable food to add to these baskets. *There is no requirement that you do so.* Be free to do so or not, as you are moved. Then please note: if you need this food for your own life or that of your family or others that you know, *please be also free to take what you need.* At the end of each week, after the community eucharist, what remains in the baskets will be given to Loaves and Fishes ministry at Saint Paul and Saint James, a meal program that sets out meals every Saturday for hundreds of people in New Haven with no questions asked.

The coming of the Thanksgiving festival reminds us of the sharing of food. The setting out of baskets for food at the door of Marquand reminds that in coming to and going from worship, we always carry others and their needs with us. Jesus Christ, around whom we gather, is the Bread of Life.

Much joy to you in the free giving and the free taking at these doors!’

A Look Ahead to This Week’s Worship:

MONDAY: Morning Worship. Visiting Professor of Christian Education, **Dr. Anne Wimberley** will be preaching. Prof. Wimberley is Professor Emerita of the Interdenominational Theological Center in Atlanta, Georgia, where she continues as Director of two Lilly Endowment funded programs for youth ministry; she is also past president of the Religious Education Association and the Association of Professors and Researchers in Religious Education.

TUESDAY: The Marquand Chapel Ministers will lead a service entitled: **The Wedding in Cana: On the Guest List.**

WEDNESDAY: SUNG MORNING PRAYER. The last in the current musical cycle. Spencer Reece will read one of his poems in remembrance of the Holocaust.

THURSDAY: Graduating Student, **Awet Andemicael**, preaching.

FRIDAY: Holy Communion in commemoration of the Day of the Dead led by YDLA with Rev. Dr. Daisy Machado (Disciples of Christ) preaching and presiding. Daisy L. Machado is Professor of Church History at Union Theological Seminary in New York City. A native of Cuba, she was raised in New York and live in Texas for twenty years; she is author of *Borders and Margins: Hispanic Disciples in the Southwest, 1888-1942* and co-editor of *A Reader in Latina Feminist Theology: Religion and Justice*.

Siobhán Garrigan

Dean of Chapel.