

“Hospitality and Building Consensus”

[Leading with Love]

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Each year our denomination honors women by having a special worship service celebrating their gifts. Celebrate the Gifts of Women Sunday focuses on women who have modeled for us what it means to **“lead with love.”**

Consider these two particular characteristics when you think of women who lead with love.

- 1) The gift of hospitality and
- 2) The gift of building consensus.

These women serve as role models for the rest of us.

The Bible is full of stories of such women leaders. In our readings this morning you heard a bit of the story of one extraordinary women named Lydia.

STORY OF LYDIA

Lydia was part of the early formation of the church in which members of the faith community broke bread in homes together, worshiped and prayed together, learned together and shared as those as any had need. Women certainly were a vital part of these customs as the church continued to develop.

The first thing Lydia did after she was baptized was to invite Paul and Silas into her home to enjoy food and fellowship. She repeatedly offered gracious hospitality in response to God’s grace.

Realistically, we know that there are those who do not like to “break bread” with people whom they dislike or with whom they disagree. It can be a difficult and awkward thing to do? Think how might the world be different if we tried to engage more with those with whom we have serious differences – not having a forum or meeting but simply fellowship – with no agenda.

As women both then and now continue to demonstrate this gift of hospitality in churches and homes, we need to think of that verse from Leviticus: *“The alien who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you; you shall love the alien as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God.”*

We need to practice radical hospitality –welcoming those most alienated in our communities. The strangers among us have names and stories and value. Welcoming them not just in our churches but in our lives offers the opportunity for growth on our own journey of faith as well.

So practicing the radical gift of Hospitality is the first gift of Leading with Love.

The second gift of leadership is “building consensus.” Presbyterian Women often meet in small groups called “circles.” The circle is not a dominant form of decision-making in our world.

What we are familiar with comes from a white, European males model - that of a formal boardroom. Picture it: mostly men seated at a long table with sharp corners. They vote up or down on actions; there are winners and losers. Churches often follow this model today.

That brings us to the gift of “building of consensus.” Inuits and many Native Americans sit in circles to deliberate and make decisions not by voting but by building consensus. They share, learn and come to decisions together.

Sitting in a circle eliminates the practice of one person of authority sitting at the head of the table, thus giving a sense of equality and inclusion. Building consensus avoids winners and losers. It calls for careful listening, clarifying, encouraging, suggesting and being attentive to ALL the voices in the room. Building consensus helps prevent making hasty decisions like those made when a simple up or down vote is taken. It is a helpful and grace-filled way to deliberate and come to decisions.

Families can make decisions by consensus while sitting around the dinner table.

Consequently, I suggest that these two traits – the gift of hospitality and the gift of building consensus are gifts exhibited by women who are called to lead with love.

What would our church and the world look like if women committed themselves to increasing their practices of hospitality and building consensus and became role models for others, men and women alike?

Think of one person who you think leads with love. Does that person extend hospitality? Is that person gracious and inclusive and does that person take the opinions of others seriously? Give thanks for that person - man or woman.

Let us pray:

Gracious God, Give each of us a heart to lead with love and a desire to do better and be better. Grant us forgiveness for when we shy away from that role and help us make a commitment to be among those who lead with love, purpose and compassion. Amen.