

Room In The Inn: A Communion Meal

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Since our beginnings, I've used many images to explain the importance of Room In The Inn. I've described the program as a "sanctuary" from the violence of the streets, "Ellis Island" for urban refugees, a "Red Cross tent" in a war zone, an "oasis" in an asphalt desert, a gathering of "friends," and as a rewriting of the original "no room in the inn" story.

The most important image I use now is the notion of a "communion meal."

Consider all the ways we eat a meal—often on the run. Twelve people sitting individually at a McDonald's eat a meal. But something is missing.

The gathering of twelve people in a Room In The Inn congregation also experience a meal, to be sure, but more. It's not just a meal, but a communion meal. A communion meal is a meal that has sharing and intimacy. It reaches the depths of the soul and the heights of mystery. It is called sacred by people of religion. Unlike God, however, no one ever doubts or needs to prove its existence. A communion meal is experienced the way we experience the sunsets and the mountain tops.

For years homeless and housed individuals have gathered to sit down and share such a meal. It has been a powerful element of grace and hospitality that has transformed thousands of lives. Regardless of the food—chili, lasagna, turkey, hamburger, potatoes, corn, salad, rolls and drink—a Room In The Inn supper carries the force of the unleavened bread, unblemished lamb and choicest wine eaten at those ancient Passover suppers and at the Last Supper.

Ultimately, such a meal contains the possibility of a communion with the God among us.

Over the years people have come together to do this. Reluctantly at first, for suspicions were plenty. Some congregation members stood on the other side of a serving counter, like vending machines dispensing food without sharing, while homeless guests wanted to go off and eat in a corner by themselves.

But the invitation of God to come, sit down and eat together won the hearts of all. And the miracle of a communion meal was born.

Now all these years later, I believe it remains our most important connection. Room In The Inn may be safe and warm, clean and quiet, dependable and secure. But most importantly, it is loving hospitality—found in the sharing, the laughter, the tears, the memories, the hopes and all those other moments that bring us communion with others and with God.