

Hospitality

William Cahoy

Benedictines are well known for their hospitality: a ready welcome, hearty food and plenty of it, a listening ear, even a warm bed if needed. In a world of strangers and superficial intimacy, this hospitality is a true gift.

Benedictine hospitality—or any authentic hospitality—suggests a different way to think about the interplay of identity and openness. All too readily we assume that identity and openness to the other operate in a zero-sum relation such that the stronger our identity, the less open we will be. Conversely, the more open we are to others, the weaker our identity or commitment to our own beliefs and principles.

This competitive relation misunderstands our particular identity as Christians. We are called to be open to the other not *in spite of* being Christian, but precisely *because* we are Christian. The challenge is to be fully, genuinely open and welcoming of the other—hospitable—while being no less fully committed to

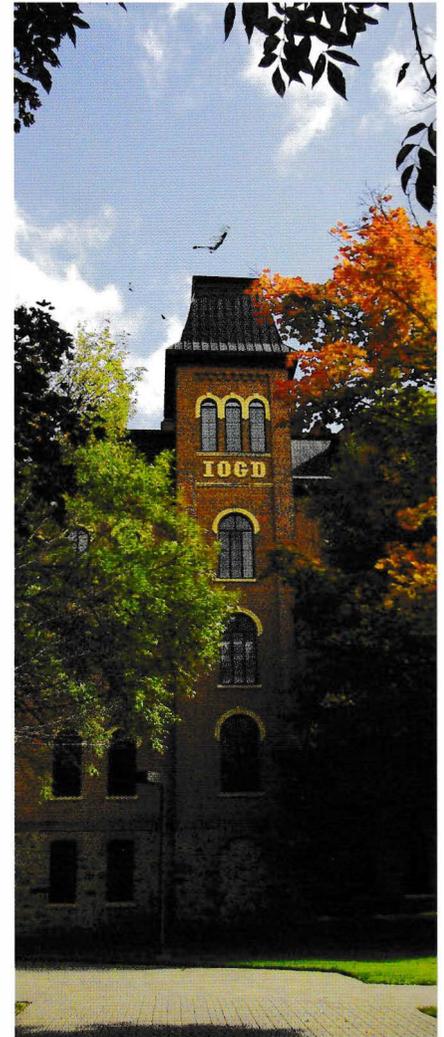
LET ALL GUESTS
BE RECEIVED
LIKE CHRIST.

RULE OF BENEDICT 53.1

our particular identity, to the beliefs and practices that make us who we are.

Ours is a world of increasing fragmentation, suspicion, and polarization, a world ever more hostile to the other, where identity becomes an impetus for seeing the other as an infection or cancer to be excised in the name of ethnic, ideological, or religious purity. In such a world hospitality is a profound witness to the Gospel, to the love of God for all God's children. Hospitality, openness, and love of the other do not weaken our identity as Christians. They are what that identity looks like.

Ultimately, this rhythm of identity and openness is rooted in nothing less than the very nature of God as Trinity. The amazing affirmation that the underlying, creative reality of the universe, God, is such that real identity—unity—is not diminished by real difference—three Persons. This eternal dance of identity and difference in love is the life of God, a life we are called to live, imitate, and make present in the world. Benedictine hospitality is a witness to this reality of God. It is a witness the world and the Church desperately need. It is about far more than simply being nice. It requires care for the well-being of others, regardless of whether they think, believe, or behave like I do. It takes practice, formation, and commitment to persist in this hospitality.



Aidan Putnam, O.S.B.

While Benedictines may be distinctly formed in the practice of hospitality, they teach us that welcome of the other is part of our identity as Christians. We can best show our gratitude for the hospitality we have received by making it a practice not limited to the monastery. **B**

Dr. William Cahoy was dean of Saint John's School of Theology and Seminary, 1999–2015.