Entertaining Angels
by Steve and Kathy Beirne

Our friend Ted told us a story that was funny and shocking at the same time. When he was young, he and his brothers had been out on a Sunday afternoon. When they came home they found guests at the house. Their mother took them aside and said, “I’ve invited this couple to stay for dinner, and there is not enough food. So when we sit down for dinner, just say that you ate downtown and aren’t very hungry.” The boys did as they were instructed, and didn’t have any dinner. Then time for dessert came, and their mother said, “Since you spoiled your appetite for dinner, there will be no dessert for you.” Talk about a double whammy!

But for us, it was really a story about hospitality, and how important it is to extend yourself to others so that they feel welcomed by you. As you begin life as a new family, deciding on the place of hospitality in your life will be an important job.

If you grew up in a family that had guests frequently, or that welcomed people easily, then hospitality will be an easy virtue for you. But if yours was a family that kept to themselves and found it uncomfortable to have others over, then it may be a stretch for you to have guests. And if the two of you have different backgrounds regarding guests, then this will become one of the many negotiations involved in being a married couple.

Extending yourself to others can take many forms. And you have already begun—after all, you hosted a crowd for your wedding! In that case you probably didn’t have to cook or clean, the way we often have to when we have guests to our house. But you did have to make them feel welcome and comfortable, and that is the highlight of being hospitable!

Having others over for dinner is a common kind of hospitality. But you can have friends in to play cards, to watch a sporting event with you, to have cake and coffee for a birthday, to have wine and cheese before going to the movies together. There are so many ways to host a gathering, inside or out, a lot of people or just one other, that it seems that whatever your style as a couple there is a way to extend hospitality that can fit for you.

Hospitality begins in our hearts and reaches out from there to others. It doesn’t even have to mean having guests in our home. You can extend hospitality to someone in church by saying hi, asking if you can help them. Have you ever received help from a passer-by on the street because you looked confused or lost? Our willingness to put aside our own agenda to reach out to another is an important aspect of hospitality.

We are hospitable when we are aware of, attentive to, the needs and desires of
others. If your friends that you have invited for dinner are vegetarian, or gluten–free, then you prepare a meal without meat, or without gluten. We try not to go on and on about our child if we are with friends who are struggling with infertility. We do that, not because we are Christian but because that is the way kind people treat one another.

But because we are Christian, we know that Jesus wants us to be givers. “Whatever you do for the least of these, you do for me,” the gospel tells us. And St. Paul gives us an even more whimsical rationale for being hospitable. “Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.”

So talk to each other about how you will be hospitable and keep the door of your home and your hearts open to any potential angels in your life!

_Steve and Kathy Beirne have extensive experience in marriage and family education, catechetics, and marriage ministry. They are the editors and publishers of Foundations Newsletter, FACET premarital resource, and Catholic and Newly Married, an award winning book published by ACTA publications. They live in Portland, Maine, and are the parents of 7 children, grandparents of 5. You can visit their websites, facetsite.com, or foundationsnewsletter.net, or contact them at foundationseditor@gmail.com_