

NURSING & AUDACIOUS Hospitality

By Lii Baxter

Hospitality, the ancient practice of welcome and care of the stranger (Nolson), is a word that some may not immediately identify with nursing. Beth Gould Nolson tells us that as Christian nurses, the care we provide for our patients is indeed rooted in the practice of hospitality, and it is an AUDACIOUS hospitality that is modeled for us by Jesus. What does that hospitality look like even when we are anxious and afraid, while wearing PPE, when discouraged from touching patients, and when stressed and over-tired?



Beth Gould Nolson is an RN with more than 30 years' experience working in a neonatal intensive care unit in a large academic hospital in Toronto. She is also a graduate student at McMaster Divinity College, in the Doctor of Practical Theology program. Her research interest is in household hospitality as a missional practice through which we partner with God in blessing the world. Her article "Audacious hospitality: nursing in the time of COVID-19" appeared in the journal "Practical Theology" on 27 January 2021. I recently had the privilege of speaking with Beth about her research and findings. Here are a few points from her paper and insights from our discussion.

The word audacious is stunning: it means fearless, unafraid, courageous, and valiant. Health care workers are still stepping boldly onto the front lines of the battle. This is audacious, yet it is part of our calling as health care workers, whether Christian or not. Although we recognize and mitigate the dangers and the health risks, nurses and other health care workers are confronted every day with barriers to providing the kind of health care they provided before. One such barrier is our own fear and anxiety related to COVID-19: fear for our own health, the health of our patients; our spouses, family members. In the early pandemic days without sufficient PPE, nurses and other health care workers watched with fear and anxiety as their colleagues around the world and in Canada became ill from Covid, and died. Now there is adequate PPE, but these safety protocols and devices erect physical barriers to the usual way of providing care. Nurses meet and care for patients through a system that is distanced, sanitized, shielded, gowned and masked. Beth speaks to some of the barriers to providing care, the unseen intangible barrier of personal fear and anxiety; the tangible barriers of PPE including masks, shields, gowns, gloves, and distancing; and the sometimes unrecognized barrier of the isolation of some patients who therefore are seen less by health care staff and not at all by family. These barriers significantly impact the therapeutic nurse-patient relationship.

As Christian nurses, how are we to respond to these obstacles and barriers, and extend audacious hospitality to our patients? We look to the hospitality provided by Jesus. It is his remarkable treatment of lepers, the unclean, women, sinners, that informs our current practice. Beth reminds us of how Jesus willingly welcomes, speaks to, and touches these, the marginalized, in our communities. Jesus is unconcerned with the "taboos" of the day and he stands in solidarity with the unclean and the outcast. He is willing to physically touch the untouchable, bringing not only healing but

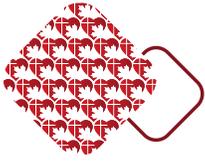
also the introduction (or reintroduction) of community to the person. Beth studies two of Jesus' miraculous healings, the healing of the bleeding woman, and the healing of the leper. In these, Jesus demonstrates and lives out the truth of the value of all men and women, regardless of their social standing, regardless of their illness. Jesus speaks kindly to the "unclean" woman with bleeding, calling her "daughter". He acknowledges her humanity. By touching the leper, and by speaking to the bleeding woman Jesus goes against the rules of the Levitical code, looking instead to God's love and value of each human being. This was bold, counter-culture, and it was risk-taking.

How do we follow Jesus' example as we care for our patients during a time of fear and physical barriers? We can look to history for some examples. During the Plague of Cyprian (15-20 year duration; about the year 250 CE) the care provided for the ill and dying by Christians contrasted sharply with the care provided by non-Christians. Christians reached out to family and neighbours who were suffering, to care for them, risking their own lives. Further, when the Bubonic Plague hit his hometown, Martin Luther wrote and spoke about his options of staying or leaving. He spoke of how "Christians are motivated to stay and care for the sick because the love for God and neighbor compels them." He stayed. (Nolson)

How do we demonstrate this type of audacious hospitality in our work, whether stepping into a Covid unit, or working in long term care, or mental health, or maternal-child care? Beth reminds us (from Watson, 1999) that "the ideal and value of caring is clearly not just a thing out there, but is a starting point, a stance, an attitude". When we start with an attitude of commitment and care, we step forward into concrete acts.



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Some of those concrete acts are so simple we may overlook them or not fully comprehend their significance. Beth encourages us to consider everything that we do to be a part of not only physical care, but spiritual care. She gives the example of committing the moments needed for hand sanitizing as a spiritual ritual, a reminder that the patient's room is a sacred place.

Whenever appropriate, Beth sits down to place herself at the same level as her patient. As always, eye to eye contact helps to establish and build the relationship. Further, listening is "one of the highest forms of hospitality" (Nouwen, from Nolson). Jesus asked questions and listened, and engaged with people; he took time.

Friends, how are we providing audacious hospitality for our clients, family, neighbors? How will you do this? Let's take up the challenge, and live out our love of God in the care we provide for our patients, remembering (Matthew 25:40) that The King will say to us "Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me."



Lilian ("Lii") Baxter is a (semi-)retired primary care nurse practitioner, most recently having worked for about 10 years at a west end Toronto Community Health Centre. Her health care experience also includes working at CAMH; and prior to becoming an NP, she worked for Emmanuel International; and for York Region Public Health. She sits on the Board of Directors of NCFC, and CCWM (Canadian Centre for World Mission). She is married, with kids and grandkids whom she misses desperately. And she's wondering if/when/where she should return to work, she would like to engage in some audacious hospitality.

JEHOVAH JIREH ~ The Lord will Provide

By Wendy Mei



I graduated from a nursing program in the U.S.A. in 2016. After graduating from nursing school, I started a nursing job in California. Unfortunately and unexpectedly, the hospital closed, and I was laid off just three months

after I started. At that time, my work permit in the States was near its end. Although I had many doubts, after prayers, I decided to go back to school, and the Lord opened up an opportunity for me to come to Canada for my master's degree in nursing.

Therefore, I moved to Canada in 2018 for a master's program in nursing. Since I was an international student, I was allowed to work only 20 hours per week. As a nurse with nearly no work experience, it was almost impossible for me to find a job while being in school since I could only work one 12-hour shift per week.

At that time, I had a lot of fear about my future. When I moved to Canada, I had no Christian family and no friends here. Also by the time I would finish my masters and be able to work full-time again I would have been out of clinical practice for almost three years. I was taking some additional courses from a local college to refresh my nursing knowledge in addition to the heavy schoolwork that I had with my master's degree. I cried almost every week during those two years writing papers in my second language, but once again, the Lord strengthened me, and I was able to finish my degree through Him (Philippians 4:13). As Hebrews 13:15 says, God never leaves us nor forsakes us.

Getting my nursing registration here in Canada was a long process, but amazingly it was approved by the CNO literally two days before my language and educational credentials expired in 2018. Also, shortly after moving to Canada, I found Nurses Christian Fellowship Canada online. I decided to join NCFC, hoping to meet Christian nurses and grow as a Christ-follower in a supportive community. The Lord has blessed me tremendously through our York Region group. After I graduated with my master's, I had such a difficult time finding a job. During this time, I had Bible studies with other NCFC group members on Zoom, where I felt supported, loved, and encouraged during this difficult time. Fronica, on the NCFC Board of Directors, constantly reached out to pray with me as I sought employment and patiently gave me wise advice throughout this long journey.

After searching for about three months, I was offered a part-time job in a Long-Term Care Facility, and I was beyond thankful for the Lord's provision. However, there were also a lot of concerns that came with it. Firstly, since I am not a permanent resident of Canada, I am not eligible for OHIP unless I work full-time. Would I be able to provide for myself by working one part-time job? I couldn't find a second part-time job since LTC workers were restricted to work in only one facility due to the pandemic. Secondly, my work permit is only for three years. If I work one part-time job, I am not utilizing my work permit fully to gain valuable work experience and to grow professionally as a nurse. Thirdly, my parents did not have peace about me taking a job in LTC. My parents are not Christians; however, Ephesians 6 commands us to obey and honor our parents. Thus, I genuinely want to show them love and respect despite the fact that they aren't Christians. I am to obey my parents unless they command me to do something that disobeys the Lord's commandments.

While I was struggling with doubts and worries, the Lord once again showed me His faithfulness and graciousness. One day, when I called Fronica to request prayer, she suggested I consider Northern Ontario Nursing and she recommended I speak with Yvonne, another wonderful Christian nurse in our NCFC group who works up North. I spoke to Yvonne about Northern Ontario Nursing, and she then referred me to my current employer.

Most importantly, this move is well supported by my parents in China. God is gracious and kind. Now I have been working in a remote community in Northern Ontario for four months and am truly loving being here. Although some days are more difficult, since I am a new nurse, there is always a lot to learn professionally. Interestingly, before moving up, I thought that I would find it boring or lonely since the community is very isolated. However, I have been able to devote myself to reading and praying without other distractions, which I believe will help me to grow more mature spiritually.

Genesis 28:15 "I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go." The Lord has taken care of me and watched over me beyond my imagination through NCFC in these past two years. My experience with NCFC has indeed been life-changing, and I am beyond thankful that the Lord led me to be a part of NCFC."

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WE'D LOVE TO HEAR FROM YOU

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