

## **Hospitality in the Religious Dimension in the Pilgrimage to Our Lady of Caravaggio, Farroupilha, RS, Brazil**

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### **Abstract**

This article seeks to describe some actions that take place during the Pilgrimage to the Shrine of Our Lady of Caravaggio, in the town of Farroupilha/RS, considering the religious hospitality that is offered to pilgrims by Church members. This study is based on the conceptual apparatus of hospitality and religiosity in religious tourism, whose basic reference sources are the studies of Boff, Baptista, Lashley, Grassi, Correia, and documents of the Catholic Church. This is a qualitative study, and the interviews were conducted with representatives of the Church who work or used to work in the Shrine during the pilgrimage. The questions seek to determine what the perception of the concept Church hospitality is. The results indicate that the Church is committed to meeting the demands for essential services, in addition to promoting and expanding the dynamics of hospitality. The pilgrimage is a relevant phenomenon that draws thousands of pilgrims who return to the site every year, thus strengthening the devotion to the Saint and stimulating religious tourism.

**Keywords:** Hospitality; Popular religiosity; Shrine of Our Lady of Caravaggio; The Catholic Church; Religious tourism.

### **Resumo**

#### **Hospitalidade na dimensão religiosa na romaria Nossa Senhora de Caravaggio em Farroupilha, RS, Brasil**

Este artigo tem como objetivo descrever algumas ações que ocorrem na romaria ao Santuário Nossa Senhora de Caravaggio no município de Farroupilha, RS, à luz da hospitalidade religiosa oferecida pelos membros da Igreja aos peregrinos. O estudo vale-se de aparato conceitual acerca da hospitalidade e religiosidade no turismo religioso e tem como referência básica os estudos de Boff, Baptista, Lashley, Grassi, Correia e de documentos da Igreja Católica. A pesquisa é de natureza qualitativa e suas entrevistas foram realizadas com representantes da Igreja que atuam ou atuaram no santuário no período da romaria. Os questionamentos buscam apurar a percepção do conceito de hospitalidade da Igreja. Os resultados apontam para um empenho da Igreja em atender a demanda de serviços essenciais e promover e ampliar a dinâmica da hospitalidade. A romaria é um fenômeno relevante que desloca milhares de peregrinos que retornam ao local anualmente e fortalecem a devoção em relação à Santa, estimulando o turismo religioso.

**Palavras-chave:** Hospitalidade; Religiosidade popular; Santuário Nossa Senhora de Caravaggio; Igreja Católica; Turismo religioso.

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## Resumen

### **Hospitalidad en la dimensión religiosa en la romería Nuestra Señora de Caravaggio, Farroupilha/RS, Brasil**

La presente propuesta tiene como objetivo describir algunas acciones que ocurren en la Romería al Santuario Nuestra Señora de Caravaggio en el municipio de Farroupilha/RS, a la luz de la hospitalidad religiosa ofrecida por los sectores de la Iglesia a los peregrinos. El estudio se vale de aparato conceptual acerca de la hospitalidad y religiosidad en el turismo religioso y tiene como referencia básica estudios de Boff, Baptista, Lashley, Grassi, Correia y de documentos de la Iglesia Católica. La investigación es de naturaleza cualitativa y las entrevistas se realizaron con representantes de la Iglesia que actúan o actuaron en el Santuario en el período de la romería. Los cuestionamientos buscan apurar la percepción del concepto de hospitalidad de la Iglesia. Los resultados apuntan a un empeño de la Iglesia en atender la demanda de servicios esenciales y promover y ampliar la dinámica de la hospitalidad. La romería es un fenómeno relevante que desplaza a miles de peregrinos que regresan al lugar anualmente y fortalecen la devoción hacia la Santa, estimulando el turismo religioso.

**Palabras clave:** Hospitalidad; Religiosidad popular; Santuario Nuestra Señora de Caravaggio/Farroupilha/RS; Iglesia Católica; Turismo religioso.

## INTRODUCTION

The discussion of hospitality has raised interest in academia at a time marked by great human mobility resulting from economic, political-social, and cultural factors in various geographical spaces. Within a religious dimension, there has been an increasing flow of the pilgrimage towards sacred places around the world; promoting religious tourism with repercussions on the economy, culture, and society.

Given this context, this study aims to analyze the hospitality offered by the Catholic Church to pilgrims on pilgrimage to the Shrine of Our Lady of Caravaggio in Farroupilha, a movement that takes place annually, around May 26th. Farroupilha lies in the northeast of Rio Grande do Sul state, almost 70 miles away from the capital, Porto Alegre.

We must emphasize that the Sanctuary of Our Lady of Caravaggio in Farroupilha is the largest religious sanctuary regarding the flow of pilgrims in southern Brazil. Located 4 miles away from the city center, it annually welcomes thousands of believers from multiple Brazilian states and countless countries. The place attracts more than 1.5 million pilgrims every year. During the pilgrimage season, the number of visitors may be greater than 300 thousand people.

Our Lady of Caravaggio is the patron saint of the municipality and the Italian colonial region, and the day of her apparition is celebrated as a municipal holiday. There is a large flow of pilgrims from neighboring towns visiting the sanctuary during the pilgrimage season. Most of them arrive on foot, as the vast majority come from Caxias do Sul, a city a little over 11 miles away from the site. In 2016, Caravaggio's pilgrimage was declared Caxias do Sul's cultural asset of immaterial nature. The sanctuary lies high above its surroundings, providing the characteristic mountain air, as well as a beautiful landscape view of valleys and vegetation.

Written history and current accounts suggest that the welcoming spirit is part of the identity incorporated into the local community by tradition. This

is perceived through the commitment of approximately one thousand people between residents and those who move there to collaborate through volunteer service during pilgrimage days.

Devotion to Our Lady of Caravaggio was brought to the area by the first Italian immigrants from northern Italy who settled in the region in 1876. According to the story narrated by Bertuol (1950), her apparition occurred at a time of territorial disputes between Milan and Venice, as well as conflicts within the Church. It was May 26, 1432, when Mary, the mother of Jesus Christ, appears and identifies herself to a peasant named Joaneta, to whom she announces the coming of peace (Bertuol, 1950; Zorzi, 1986). Mary entrusts her with the mission of delivering the message to the rulers and the people and bids them resume Catholic Christian practices such as penance, fasting on Fridays, and going to church to pray on Saturday afternoons in gratitude for punishments avoided. Mary also requests that a chapel is built at the place of her apparition (Bertuol, 1950).

The first chapel, which gave rise to the current sanctuary in Farroupilha, was built by the initiative of the 22 families who migrated there. With space to accommodate over 100 people, its inauguration took place in 1879, considered the year of the foundation of the Sanctuary of Caravaggio. In 1885, the illustration of the apparition, an object of devotion which is currently displayed on the furnishings that support the statuary ensemble within the sanctuary, was replaced by sculptured images by Pietro Stangherlini – a sculptor residing in Caxias do Sul/RS at the time. The current sanctuary was built in Roman style between the years of 1945 and 1963, with capacity to accommodate up to 2,000 people. In addition to the old sanctuary, the space has a radio station, the chapel of former vows, a confessional room, event spaces, restaurants, a religious articles store, and other support structures.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The study is classified as exploratory and qualitative in nature. The method used was the discursive textual analysis that, through the creation of analytical categories, allows the examination of the interviewees' narratives. The methodological support was based on Moraes and Galiazzi's (2007) theoretical-methodological approach, which takes discursive textual analysis as an analytical option for qualitative and hermeneutic research.

Data collection was performed through field research through guided and recorded individual interviews with subjects currently or previously involved with the pilgrimage of Our Lady of Caravaggio in Farroupilha, encompassing experiences from 1940 to 2018. According to the criteria established for the study, 24 interviews were conducted between December 23, 2016, and April 19, 2018, which constitute the research *corpus*. The sample consists of priests, nuns, pastoral agents, and residents.

## **APPROACHES TO THE CONCEPT OF HOSPITALITY**

Hospitality has been taking a prominent place in the field of philosophical and scientific discussion, stemming from the adversities arising from globalization,

which causes human migrations, violence by tribes, and stronger neighbors in the face of economic chaos and misery affecting economically fragile countries. There seems to be a broad and complex understanding of the meaning of “hospitality”.

A point of convergence that seems to prevail among theorists is that hospitality refers to the welcoming of other people. This treatment regards gestures that involve amiability, friendliness, kindness, attention, cordiality, courtesy, politeness, finesse, sweetness, and gentleness expressed through the attitude of openness to the other that is born from the perspective of being asked or invited to share a space of reciprocity through unwritten rules, rites, and laws.

Hospitality characterizes a virtue, a quality that conforms to what is considered right and desirable for morality, religion, and social behavior, but it also means the assimilation of the tension between those who oppose it. Hospitality can also be interpreted by its ambiguities when it is not seen in its entirety and presents several constraints that may arise from one’s understanding of the concept of hospitality and hostility.

Within the religious context, hospitality brings the trait of transcendence, a characteristic that permeates multiple religions. In Christianity, hospitality begins to express itself most effectively through the creation of the first charitable and hospitality institutions from the year 321, when the Roman emperor Constantine recognizes the right of the Catholic Church to receive donations (Godi, 2011). The spirit of welcoming those most in need and overlooked by societal structures have given rise to what is currently known as the *Santa Casas* (Holy Houses): hospitals created by the Catholic Church, which are also of great importance in contemporary times, together with other charitable and social assistance institutions<sup>1</sup>.

The welcoming posture in the Catholic Church brings up memories of the care, attention, and willingness to welcome new arrivals. This idea is steeped in the collective imagination, and those who approach the religious community expect to have their needs met. The influence of today’s consumer society has strong consequences and implications for individual and collective behavior, affecting the society in its entirety and contributing greater challenges to those who identify with the Christian cause.

Grassi (2011) notes that the invitation, welcoming, charity, and solidarity seem to be neighboring forms derived from an initial idea of hospitality. In a gesture of compensation, hospitality implies the introduction into a space and the instatement of a welcoming ritual. The space to be penetrated may be geographical, involving the urban and domestic components; or psychic, which implies penetration into one territory, the territory of the other.

Grassi (2011) further considers the issue of “time” implied in hospitality, that is, there is a time for hospitality. The author observes that the condition of the guest comprises non-permanence since by doing it they become a member and settle in space. Therefore, “the guest can only be given a temporary right of residence because their assimilation into a community implies losing their guest status” (Grassi, 2011, p. 46). Thus, hospitality is a stage that cannot translate a constant disposition of beings but constantly addresses new temporary

1. Charitable institutes run by the Catholic Church worldwide include 5,158 hospitals; 16,523 health posts; 612 leprosaria; 15,679 homes for older adults, chronically ill, and disabled individuals; and 78,088 other institutions (“Vatican”, 2016).

partners, it is characterized by a rite of passage or initiation of social bonds, a temporary gift of space.

Correia (2014) understands that hospitality is revealed as one of the ways for the development of Christian identity in the faith community, arguing that its exercise, besides being an eloquent testimony for outsiders, fosters a warm environment for insiders. Correia considers that, in all civilizations, the history of the relationship between individuals, groups, and peoples has witnessed many moments of hospitality and hostility, it also portrays the meaningfulness and value that each society has attributed, and still credits, to the human person. For the author, no civilization can be built on the fringes of society. He believes that the Sacred Scripture itself accentuates, in its entirety, the necessity, and importance of hospitality, as frequently promoted and advised in its lines, even if sometimes it also advises caution in its exercise, as indicated in the book of Wisdom ("The Bible", 1983, pp. 21-34).

Godi (2011) states that the Church, as a symbol of the house of mercy, is a place that brings together specific conditions based on the principle of love of neighbor and fraternal acceptance of the other, which links it to the practice of hospitality from its inception. The Church is a place destined to welcome the faithful community to bring it closer to God, a place of spiritual hospitality, where the believer is welcomed into the sacred abode and, consequently, invited to live the experience with the transcendent.

The doctrinal framework of the Catholic Church is essentially human in character and is centered on Jesus Christ, who is the referential icon of human history by presenting a project of integral life to those who adhere to his proposal (Conferência Nacional dos Bispos do Brasil [CNBB], 1993). Although the Catholic Christian is aware of the way to go in their life in faith, its practice is demanding and requests commitment, dedication, listening, and affection, expressed in the call for unconditional openness to the other, who comes as a supplicant or guest, to share a space in reciprocity. This attitude often challenges values that prevail in society.

## **HOSPITALITY AS VIRTUE AND ETHICS**

Hospitality, in the religious sphere, carries the trace of transcendence that permeates religions. Boff (2012) points out that hospitality is par excellence the virtue of nomads, migrants, and pilgrims. The author considers that we are all pilgrims in a way and somehow deserving of hospitality because, without people, communities and peoples would not foster reciprocity among themselves or strengthen the bonds of peace and friendship.

Boff (2005) understands hospitality as one of the four central virtues for truly human sociability, together with coexistence, tolerance, and commensality. The experience of these virtues can contribute to the rescue of ethics and spirituality for the construction of a future of sustainability for mankind. Virtues constitute the world of excellence and values with a utopian appeal of the potential to transport the human to more open horizons. According to Judeo-Christian scriptures, hospitality from one to another is the basis on the ground that "we are all guests on this earth and have no permanent abode here" (Boff, 2005, p. 13).

Regarding societal dynamics, Boff (2005) alludes to Thomas Kuhn and Fritjof Capra, who introduced to the contemporary debate the issue of changing paradigms and recognizing that another kind of perception of reality is emerging. The ally, guest, and commensal paradigm must be contrasted with the paradigm of the enemy and confrontation. Boff (2005, p. 30) argues that “we must move from confrontation to conciliation, from conciliation to coexistence, from coexistence to communion, from communion to commensality”. The practice of these virtues provides the basis for a future of hope with new values, dreams, a way of architecturally organizing knowledge, social relationship classes, and ways to communicate with nature.

Boff notes that religious traditions are important for the pursuit of minimal ethical consensus among humans, as they hold unsuspected virtualities. Through religion, peoples have concretely found a way to enforce and guarantee the universal and unconditional character of minimal consensus. For the author, “religion founds the unconditionality and the obligatoriness of ethical norms far better than reasonably convincing abstract reason or rational discourse, only accessible by some sectors of society” (Boff, 2009, p. 80).

The attitude of welcoming evokes the memory of care, attention, and willingness to welcome those who arrive. This idea is imbued in the collective imagination and those who approach the religious community have this expectation of acceptance. In the present historical moment, however, with a context marked by traces of secularism, the instilled and assimilated influences in the consumer society have strong implications on the individual and collective behavior regarding the welcoming process. It brings to light the basic structure of the human being and the understanding that our existence takes place because we have been welcomed one way or another. Boff (2005) argues that feeling rejected and excluded is the worst feeling that relates to the human being.

Another vision of hospitality is that of Baptista (2002, p. 157), who treats it as “a privileged way of interpersonal meeting marked by the attitude of welcoming towards the other” and that sees in the relationship of proximity a possible way to truly embrace the adventure of discovering, accomplishing, and overcoming ourselves. Thus, hospitality presents itself as a fundamentally constructive experience of subjectivity itself, through which it must be enhanced in all its various ways and life contexts.

Baptista discusses the ethical dimension of hospitality and highlights the need to create and nurture places of hospitality where the awareness of common destiny and the sense of responsibility capable of motivating solidarity action can emerge. The author stresses out that without the ability to be physically and spiritually touched by events that expose other people’s vulnerability, any rational effort would be rendered useless. She recalls the human misfortunes that continue to afflict our time and argues that the experience of contact and the relationship of hospitality make human sensibility possible. Hospitality allows us to break the selfish cycle from the moment someone joins our midst. Thus, selfishness is possible only as a deliberate and conscientious choice, and no longer as innocent self-love (Baptista, 2002).

Baptista (2008, p. 8) reiterates that “personal identity feeds on the bonds of temporal roots and these depend on the connection to a natural, cultural, and

relational environment, and thus to a reference territory". The author considers that territorial organization forms influence the community belonging styles with power to decisively condition life trajectories and social interaction. In this sense, the questioning of otherness contributes to animate the competence or gift of kindness. From this subtle excess of hospitality emerge the acts that express human sociability, for kindness, lies in the fact that we give to ourselves so that a breath of goodwill overflow through family devotion, friendship, professional obligation, and civic responsibility.

Another author who contributes to the understanding of hospitality in the sense of explaining it as a social behavior that expresses collective life is Lashley (2004, p. 14), who approaches hospitality in the private domain and considers that "the nuclear family introduces individuals to rules, rituals, norms, and customs that shape hospitality activities in the social setting". The domestic setting contributes to the offer of hospitality and provides the opportunity to situate the individual and family in the context of civility. Reasons for the domestic activity that involve the nutritional and altruistic aspects contribute to creating a safe environment and shaping the expectations of the non-domestic supply of hospitality. On the other hand, guests make their contribution as agents in assessing the social interaction of individuals and families.

Thus, Lashley understands hospitality as a set of behaviors originating from the very base of society. Sharing and exchanging the fruits of labor, together with mutuality and reciprocity, are the essence of collective organization and sense of community. The author states that acts contributing to the replenishment and sharing of collective food supplies are the basis of obligations and rights that underpin hospitality. Activities related to hospitality foster an environment for individual social evaluation and help in the development of social ties.

## **RELIGIOUS SANCTUARIES AND POPULAR FAITH**

Sanctuaries worldwide welcome millions of pilgrims annually, with an increasingly heterogeneous and complex audience. According to the Catholic Church "sanctuary is a church or any sacred place to where believers, for the sake of piety, go on pilgrimages in large numbers with the approval of the places' Ordinary" (Portuguese Episcopal Conference, 1983, p. 212).

Most Christian sanctuaries are related to Mary, mother of Jesus Christ, and situations that involve her "apparition" in diverse times, places, and cultures. What we commonly call "private appearances and revelations" the Catholic Church defines as "psychic experiences. . . that is, extraordinary phenomena that cannot be assumed, but of which there have been numerous reports of experiences" (CNBB, 2009, p. 15).

The *Code of Canon Law* states that, in sanctuaries, the most abundant means of salvation are to be made available to the faithful, with the careful proclamation of the word of God and the promotion of liturgical life, especially through the celebration of the Eucharist, the penance, and also the cultivation of approved forms of popular piety ("The Bible", 1983).

Pilgrimages are related to popular religiosity and are linked to sanctuaries and religious experience. Popular religiosity comprises ritual gestures, acts of

worship, accounts and celebrations, and is characterized by being “a typical religiosity attributed to the average human being, devoid of special theological training” (Mattai, 1993, p. 1001).

By popular religiosity, Foralosso (2003) understands the effectiveness of faith and religion in human behavior. It is a universal experience in which each people express their perception of transcendence, nature, society, and history in different ways through cultural mediations. Popular religiosity, therefore, is not necessarily related to Christian revelation. The term “popular” refers explicitly to the subjects of religious experience.

In the Vatican document *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (evangelization in the modern world) Pope Paul VI (1975) drew attention to the richness of popular piety, recalling that they express a thirst for God that only the simple and the poor can know, and that enables acts of generosity and sacrifice in them, and even acts of heroic nature when it comes to manifesting their faith. This piety carries an acute sense of God’s attributes: paternity, providence, and constant loving presence, and foments an inner presence rarely observed in the past with the same intensity: patience, a sense of the religion that permeates daily life, detachment, openness to others, and devotion (Paul VI, 1975).

The same document warns of the limitations of this religious manifestation, as it is often open to the penetration of many religious deformations such as superstitions. Another aspect to be considered is that popular religiosity often remains only at the level of cultic manifestations, without expressing or determining true adherence to faith, and may even lead to the formation of sects, endangering the true ecclesial community. If this religiosity, however, is well-oriented, especially through a pedagogy of evangelization, it may provide a richness of values. Therefore, in considering its positive aspects, the document prefers calling it “popular piety” in the sense of “people’s religion” rather than religiosity.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Individual and guided interviews were conducted to answer the questions presented by this study on the hospitality provided by the Church to the people who participate in the pilgrimage to the Sanctuary of Our Lady of Caravaggio. Two analytical categories arise from the analysis of these interviews: the meaning of the Church’s hospitality and the meaning of pilgrimage. Through these categories, one can understand the meaning attributed by the Church to hospitality and how the institution perceives the way of pilgrimage.

### **THE MEANING OF THE CHURCH’S HOSPITALITY**

The study subjects indicated that the understanding of the sense of hospitality perceived by the Church approximates the meaning of “hospitality” to that of “welcoming”, however, the latter is considered to be the most appropriate in dealing with the subject in the religious sphere.

Narratives presented reveal that the actions that represent the hospitality offered by the Church and, therefore, its welcoming, mainly involve the



relationships developed with the people who arrive in the religious space, as well as giving them attention; welcoming; listening; caring for them; assisting them in prayer; respecting; leading; integrating; understanding; providing them with the support of hope and welcoming in conditions such as anguish; despair; crying; happiness; but especially in anguish and despair.

Welcoming as a human and relational phenomenon was approached by Santos, Perazzolo & Pereira (2014) as that which settles in the space that develop between two individuals who wish to welcome and be welcomed, and which is revealed through the commitment of the local community that is genuinely dedicated to receive the pilgrims, providing them with everything required to the fulfilling of their needs.

In the accounts, hospitality is seen as a means of spiritual welcoming:

*It is to enable a person to say what he feels, what he expects, what he suffers, what he expects from the Church, what the Church has to say to her at that moment. (I8)<sup>2</sup>*

*I felt welcome because the priest listened to me, felt what I was living... This welcoming was not any judgment that the priest made of me; it was what I could express, that is, in the Sanctuary of Caravaggio I found acceptance from the priest. The kind of welcoming that is listening, instead of judgment. (I8)*

According to Grassi (2011), welcoming, charity, and solidarity are similar because they contribute to an initial form of hospitality. In a gesture of hospitality and welcoming, the pilgrim is introduced into a geographical, and at the same time, psychic space. The geographical space is the path that culminates in the sanctuary, while the psychic space provides a territory of transcendence within the faith. Welcoming in pilgrimage implies making oneself available to people and pilgrims, attuning to the need for human contact.

According to interviewees' reports, welcoming is "understanding the human heart, beyond words, [understanding] what goes on in people's hearts" (I5). Church's hospitality is welcoming, understanding, acknowledgment, caring, a word of hope. The human being is always in motion. As such, religious practice tends to provide it with resources to exercise its autonomy on the existential path.

Likewise, reports from other interviewees reveal that "welcoming is listening, understanding, and giving a response of faith, love, and hope so that the person can carry on their journey of life" (I21).

*The sanctuary is this place of reference for many people; but after the pilgrims return there is always a different, renewed return, in which many say: "Look, I occasionally have to come here to renovate my life, to find peace, a word of comfort or counsel, to find the sacraments." (I5)*

*Care in the Church is expressed through the interest we have in the lives of those who come to the temple, which is the same as embracing each one of them. (I7)*

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2. Letter "I": Short form to represent "Interviewee".

The hospitality of the Church is *“the welcoming of the individual; not only of their body but much more; it is the welcoming of anguish; of a cry, if needed; of a smile; it is the welcoming of the whole person; above all, it is welcoming people in their despair and anguish”* (123).

Grassi (2001) speaks of a time for hospitality, that is, a period that does not extend indefinitely, because permanence implies assimilating into the community and becoming a member of this community, with which the visitor or guest *status* would cease. In this way, the hospitality offered to pilgrims in pilgrimage is a temporary gift from a space where they are welcomed and provided with the available resources: listening, spirituality, spaces of physical and mental comfort, and words of hope so they can carry on their lives in a renewed way.

## The meaning of pilgrimage

Regarding the question about “the meaning of people pilgrimaging to the sanctuary”, the interviewees’ narratives present a variety of motivations, such as showing gratitude for graces achieved, the search for an experience of God, the search for strengthening faith and the sense of it “being a way”. Church’s official documents address the human vocation of being on this Earth on our way to an existence beyond the one we are living. Walking is a constant in human life in search of something ever higher. The human experience of a priest, revealed in his speech, shows that *“The meaning of walking is a constant reminder that we are incomplete beings, we are an unfinished project”* (17).

*Nowadays, this symbolism of walking, of inviting, of participating in pilgrimage speaks volumes. Going there and visiting is also an attitude of sacrifice. So, people express their religiosity in these attitudes. They want to do something that they think will do them good, so they can please and find God.* (19)

Most of the pilgrims who travel from Caxias do Sul to the sanctuary in the days of the pilgrimage travel approximately 11 miles on foot. The strengthening of faith can be perceived in the speech of a resident who acts as a pastoral agent and has also become a pilgrim and lived the experience of setting out and experiencing what the occasion has to offer.

*People who come from Caxias [do Sul], they carry Caxias on their back, because they carry their house, they carry their jobs, their schools, their hospitals... They carry that hope, they carry that grace... A pilgrim is a person of equal stature, he is an equally frail person, but he feels like a giant; we feel giant when we are in pilgrimage.* (14)

Some priests offered accounts of the pilgrims’ search and the need to fill their lives with faith, as well as express their gratitude to God through the pilgrimage. *“They come to seek faith, to thank for their lives, and to be well-received so that they can sit and pray”* (13). *“There is no rain or bad weather that takes away their desire to pray, to participate in the sacraments, to show their appreciation”* (19).

*“But Father, I came here because I need to take a step towards faith within myself. I need to believe in God.” Even in recognizing all this, this person lacked something else. “I must take a step towards faith because nothing is enough for me. This is all too little to me. I need to take a step toward faith.” They seek a moment of prayer, a moment of confession, a moment of spirituality. They come to experience the human welcoming of the people. (15)*

Some interviewees showcase how pilgrims express their faith and expectations as they are inside the sanctuary.

*Standing in front of Our Lady’s image, praying and touching the image, then meeting a priest, if possible. (19)*

*Many go there to vent their sadness and their anguish, either in themselves, their families, the society, or in a setback that is taking place in their lives. (110)*

*This experiment of reaching out to someone who will listen to you. Because of those who go on pilgrimage, those who come here. . . . Some testimonies we hear are very real; those people’s testimonies are so strong that it is very difficult to question them. This strong experience of asking and being answered, of something concrete that accompanies the person, is what brings people here. (113)*

*The perpetual human crisis revolves around the fact that “Nobody listens to anyone,” unless they do it out of need, just out of obligation. (117)*

*The fact is that this is a work of God, it is beyond our control. It is beyond us! As much as we try to prepare the environments and everything else, this is a story of the hand of God that is leading, and that is where Our Lady decided to sit and welcome us. (15)*

Interviews presented narratives that portrayed the spirit of solidarity impregnated in the subjects involved in the works that support the pilgrimages through volunteer servicing. Data indicates that all families, with people of various ages, voluntarily collaborate in pilgrimage-related services in all functional structures provided. In the sharing relationship, Baptista (2008) sees a space for the things of the world to become interactional contents and to acquire value and meaning, in a relationship where “giving, exchanging, and giving back” things people feed a relational chain that transcends the simple circulation and exchange of goods, as observed by Mauss (2003). The narrative of a resident visibly dedicated to contributing to the pilgrimage showcases their love of community service and role within the volunteering vocation.

*Whoever discovers this vocation for volunteering and participating is a person who carries a great treasure within. . . It is the person who works most at home, or the factory or any other work environment. It is also the person who never says no, who is always available. It is the person who has the most time left. When someone is out on the street and looks at that person, they will notice that even in suffering, even when carrying [problems], the volunteer is that person who is willing to serve. They are not armored, but people who suffer like anyone else, who get sick, have family*

*problems. . . . They are also the people who most likely carry a smile on their lips... The person unable to discover this vocation also faces difficulties, only that they carry on a single situation: they carry only suffering. That is why this person is closed, cold, like iron. (I14)*

Hospitality reveals itself in a set of behaviors originating from the base of the society, as discussed by Lashley (2004). Gestures of sharing and exchanging the fruits of labor, together with mutuality and reciprocity, constitute the essence of collective organization and sense of community. These traits can be perceived in the speech of a priest involved in the organization of the pilgrimage while describing the action of those involved in the services during the religious event.

*About a thousand people were working, almost 100% did it all for free, to serve the pilgrims well. . . . Free dedication is also one of the factors that greatly move those who collaborate with the sanctuary. (I17)*

## **FINAL CONSIDERATIONS**

Hospitality seems to require an adjective to be made explicit when the subject is the religious realm. The hospitality of the Church concerns “welcoming” since the expectation of those who reach out to it, or resort to its resources mainly seek to supply needs related to the spiritual dimension, whereas hospitality itself, in the perception of the Church representatives who acted as study subjects, is associated with a concept of service that involves the material aspect.

The gratuity, listening, caring, understanding, and being compassionate about the suffering of others are expressions that refer to the inner characteristics of a person, their spiritual condition, and involve the perspective of transcendence.

The sanctuary is seen as a welcoming place that provides pilgrims with an answer to their yearnings. Serving pilgrims nearly becomes a mission to promoting spiritual care, being available for listening, looking at the other and offering them comfort.

The richness of the interviews makes it possible to understand how those who work on pilgrimages use hospitality as a welcoming tool that promotes the return of the pilgrims and their families for several decades, characterizing each one as a returning pilgrim.

Another result highlighted by the study is the preparation that Church members receive in the reception. The actions of hospitality by priests and the community itself towards pilgrims reveal their involvement with the pilgrimage and how they act in response to the demands arising from these pilgrimages. The response that the pilgrim receives from the Church strengthens the devotional practices that feed the religious search.

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**Rosalina Luiza Cassol Schvarstzhaupt:** Definition of the research problem and objectives; development of the theoretical proposition; bibliographical review and theoretical foundation; choice of methodological procedures; data collection; data analysis; elaboration of tables, graphs, and figures; calculations and projections; writing of the manuscript; adequacy of the manuscript to the RTA rules.

**Vania Beatriz Merlotti Herédia:** Literature review and theoretical foundation; choice of methodological procedures; critical revision of the manuscript.