

*“The Eleventh”*  
*by Henri Barbusse\**  
**A Civic Reflection Discussion Guide**

❖ **Introduction**

Practices of leading, giving and serving are not just skills, strategies or techniques that can be infinitely honed. They are human situations in which we find ourselves, for better or worse—remarkable human situations that both express and test our relationships to others.

This story by Henri Barbusse invites us to reflect on the challenges of giving and serving with each other. It explores one tradition of giving—a tradition of hospitality, one might say—through its effect on one person who helps to uphold it.

There are at least three centers of moral gravity in this story—places that we can connect to. One is the tradition of hospitality practiced by the House. Another is what happens to the practitioner of this tradition. Yet another is the experience of those served, and those not served.

❖ **Questions**

*What happens to the assistant in this story? How would you describe it? As enlightenment? The growth of cynicism?*

*What kind of tradition is the tradition of the House? Noble? Arbitrary?*

*Does the picture painted in this story of an institution, its servant and clientele reflect in any way the world of choices you are called upon to make in your civic work?*

*How do you stay committed to giving and serving—either in a particular organization or as an individual—when you are confronted difficult choices and your own doubts? What would you say to the assistant in our story?*

❖ **Wrap-up: The One-Minute Reflection**

- 1) What, if anything, was useful about this conversation?
- 2) As you leave, what is your question?

---

\* In *The Perfect Gift*, ed., Amy A. Kass, Indiana University Press, 2002.