

OCTOBER

“Welcoming the Stranger “ by Deaconess Student Almuth Koby

Hymn Suggestion

“All Are Welcome” (ELW #641) or “All People That on Earth Do Dwell” (LSB #791)

Scripture

“Let mutual love continue. Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it.” Hebrews 13:1-2

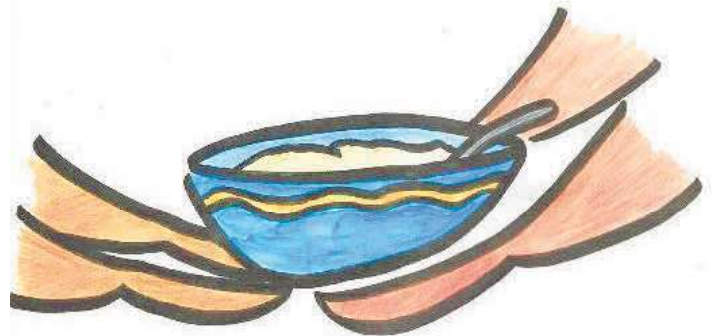
“You shall also love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.” Deuteronomy 10:19

Devotion

When I arrived in the USA as a young bride, I learned first-hand what it is like to be the stranger in a new land. Eager to get to know my new country, and a bit lonely for a circle of friends, I would peek into windows on my walks, wondering how the families inside these homes lived, what their thoughts might be, and what they might do.

Imagining that other newcomers to this country might be similarly curious, my husband and I started reaching out to foreign college students, inviting them into our lives by sharing outings and meals. Sometimes, the unexpected blessing to us was their gift of deep friendships, some lasting a long time. One of these students became the godfather of one of our children, and our connection lasts to this day.

A young man, freshly arrived from India, who had driven around town trying to find a church that celebrated Christmas Day, as was the custom in his country, found our church open. A friendship bloomed after we invited him to join us for dinner that day. Two years later, when he earned his Master’s degree, his mother came to the US for several weeks. She, too, joined us for Christmas and our friendship expanded to include his family, too.



Not all of my contacts with international visitors are planned and organized, but they all contain a form of blessing. One Sunday, two Chinese women and their young children visited our church. I learned that they were visiting scholars at the university and wanted to learn all they could about American culture -- including going to church. They asked many questions, among them the meaning of three large paintings in our narthex. I told them the story of Jesus' birth depicted in the first painting, moved to the one with the crucifixion scene, and finally the one with the empty tomb.

Suddenly I realized that I was in the middle of a holy moment: the paintings were the conduit that allowed me to share, in a simple and yet deep way, the main points of the Good News: Jesus came to us as a human, died for us on the cross, and for all people overcame death. I do not know what that moment meant to the women, but it was a blessing to me.

One of my favorite sayings is: "If I cannot travel the world, I can invite the world into my home." I've watched my children learn to see friendships with people from anywhere around the world as natural. They've soaked up stories about different cultures and listened carefully to different accents. We've all learned to laugh at the inevitable miscommunication and to adjust our way of speaking so others may understand. Wondering who is the true beneficiary of showing hospitality to strangers, I am often astounded that by offering hospitality to "the stranger" how much more I am receiving than I am giving.

Questions for Reflection & Discussion

- Who is the stranger in your area?
- What gifts do you have to make the stranger feel welcome?

Prayer

Loving and protecting God, you created all of humankind. Give us the courage to reach out to the strangers in our midst, knowing they are also your beloved children. We ask that you bless us all with your surprises in each new friendship. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

About the Author

Almuth Koby is a second-career deaconess student after raising and homeschooling her five children. She lives in Kent, OH.