

The Reconciling in Christ Team is a group of members (Celene Welch, Nathan Graham, Chris Clarkson, Nancy Johnson, Suzanne Terry, and Pastor John Bell) tasked to explore with the congregation whether it is time for Christ The Servant to commit to becoming a 'Reconciling in Christ' (RIC) community. An RIC church is one that proclaims itself to be welcoming and inclusive to people of all sexual orientations and gender identities (LGBTQIA+ people).

The Dual Blessing of Hospitality

Guest article by Dennis Schurter

The Welcome statement in the Sunday bulletin at Christ the Servant immediately captured my attention the first time I read it. First, the length – then the diversity of people included – then the humor. In the Scriptures the concept of “welcome” is spoken of as hospitality. While the word “hospitality” does not appear frequently, the idea of hospitality for the stranger runs like a golden thread through the fabric of the narratives and the poetry of Scripture.

From Moses’ words to Israel as they prepared to enter the promised land – “You shall also love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt” (Deut. 10:19) – to Jesus’ words to his disciples – “Love your enemies” (Matt. 5:44) – hospitality for neighbor and stranger alike is expressed in many ways.

It is easy for us to read the Bible’s emphasis on hospitality as a command and an obligation. But this would be to miss what God is actually offering us in each act of welcoming another. Every act of hospitality carries a promise, the promise of a gift offered to us through the presence of the stranger or the neighbor. Here are three examples:

When Abraham saw three strangers standing nearby one hot day (Gen. 18:1-15), he eagerly welcomed them and prepared a meal to sustain them on their journey. Before the strangers left, they gave to him and Sarah the promise of a son – a gift that startled and surprised them both.

When Dale Evans and Roy Rogers, well known from TV and film to those of us who are Baby Boomers, welcomed a “little stranger” into their family in 1950, they named her Robin Elizabeth. She was born with Down Syndrome and had significant health issues. But when doctors suggested they “put her away”, they refused; rather, they encompassed her in their family circle of love. When Robin died at the age of two, Dale and Roy knew that they had been blessed with a gift in this child. Dale later wrote their story in *Angel Unaware*.

When I went to serve as chaplain at Denton State School in 1975, all the people who lived there were strangers to me. As time passed, not only did I get to know them as individuals, but they taught me that each person has a gift to offer if I would only look for it and receive that gift in our relationship. Such a gift may be as simple as a smile or a hug; it may be as piercing as someone teaching me a lesson in patience or forgiveness.