



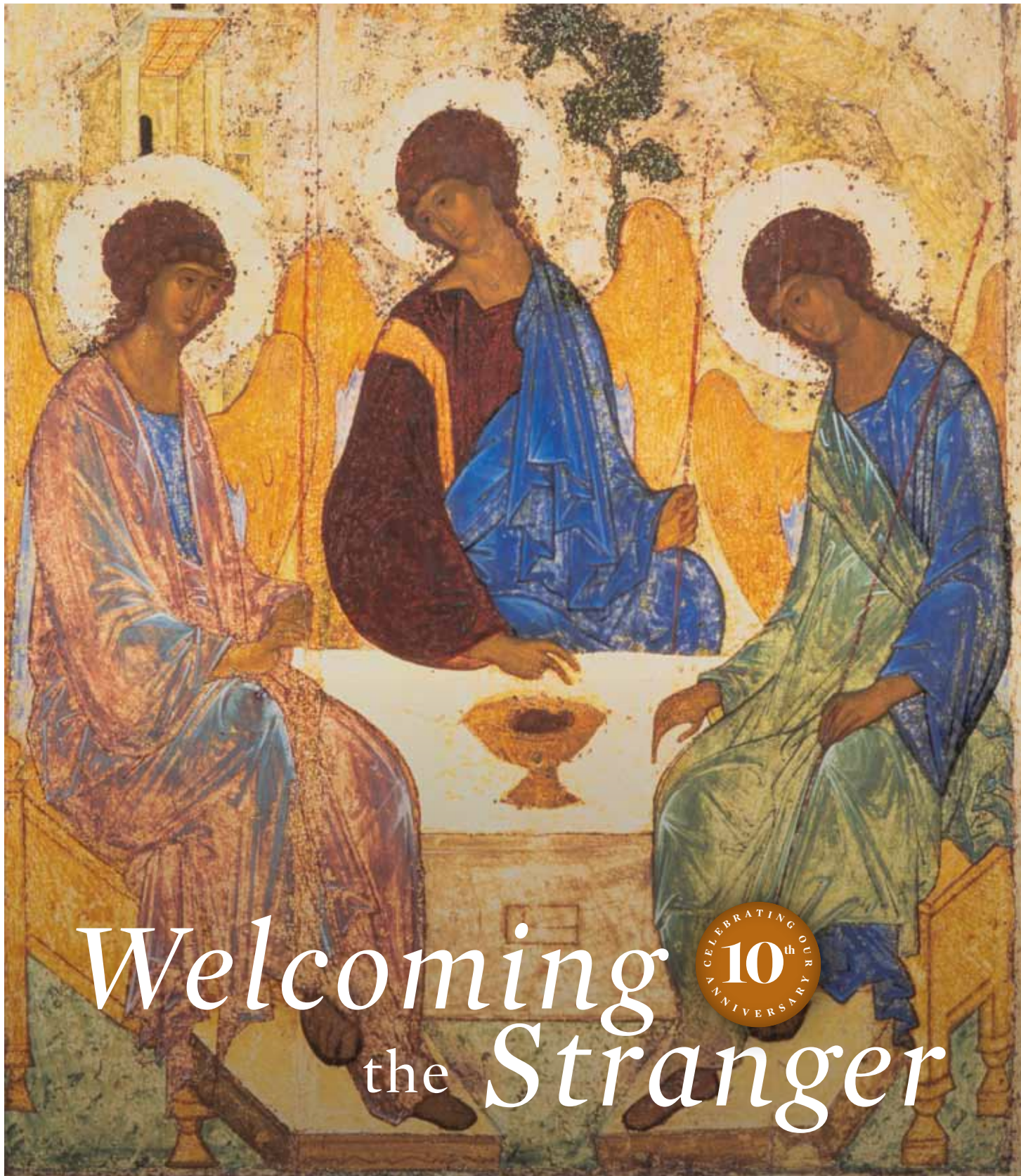
CONVERSations



volume

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Welcoming the Stranger



CONVERsations

A FORUM FOR *Authentic* TRANSFORMATION



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CONVERSATIONS GUIDE

BY KIM ENGELMANN



A VISION OF THE REDEEMED LIFE: TRANSFORMATION TRUMPS INFORMATION IN WELCOMING THE STRANGER BACK HOME

JOHN ORTBERG



In his article on a vision for the redeemed life, John Ortberg invites us to think about transformation in the context of how modernity is influencing spiritual formation. He cites the REVEAL study, as well as other recent research on why church attendance and religious affiliation have plummeted in the last decade. Even folks that are still attending church, aren't "getting" much out of it evidenced by the findings in these studies. Many, including *UnChristian* authors Kinnaman and Lyons, and the "New Atheists" believe the church needs to come up with a new way to 'measure' spiritual growth. Ortberg references what Dallas Willard calls "schools of life"—where people are regularly learning to interact with a present spiritual reality that nourishes the soul, as an approach that the church should take to aid in the

spiritual formation of Believers.

Ortberg discusses his training as a clinical psychologist, and how the field of Psychology has shifted from focusing on pathology, to flourishing—with the emergence of "Positive Psychology." As this branch of psychology is asking questions like "what does the well-lived life look like?" and exploring virtues and ethics—the church has an excellent entry point to join the discussion.

In their conversation, Moon and Ortberg talk about transformation within the context of 'welcoming the stranger.' "From what we've learned from the REVEAL study and others, the church is now at a pivotal point to welcome [back] some folks that left the fold, or are on the verge of leaving. One of the reasons people point to for leaving the church is the lack of spiritual growth that occurs [within the church community.]" Ortberg goes on to state that, "We adopt highly superficial and visible behavioral indicators for spirituality rather than a life that is transformed by having a truly well-formed, re-formed core..."

1. Have you (are you) disenchanted with the amount of spiritual growth occurring within your faith community?
2. In what ways have you experienced hospitality at church? Have you been the stranger that was welcomed (or welcomed back after a time of separation from the community)?
3. Did this hospitality foster your spiritual growth? Or, if you experienced a lack of hospitality, did it impede your faith?
4. John cites 'spiritual experimentation' as a key reason that the early church flourished. He also admits this is his dream for our day, is to develop a 'way of life' in which people living in our world can actually grow toward greater transformation. What ways are you "experimenting" with your faith to develop a way of life? community?

CHRISTIAN HOSPITALITY: OUR EXERCISE IN FAITH

JANICE PETERSON



This lovely article expresses the joy of hospitality that Eugene and Janice work into their daily lives. As Janice points out, "hospitality is something we do to and for one another without expecting any returns". It is local, personal and risky because no one can determine how it will be received. Convenience must be put to one side so that hospitality can happen well. Sharing honestly Janice speaks about the challenges and gifts that came from having church happen in their home early on in their ministry. A real sense of family emerged. They also trusted God and took in some children who needed a home temporarily in their church. Friends of their teenagers found refuge at their home, along with many others who needed sanctuary. Janice found that providing space and hospitality means caring and providing for the other person – not trying to change them. "I learned that our hospitality should not be a way of working God and our way into the lives of others, but creating an opportunity for others to find God and his way in their lives. That's what I call offering "holy space." Jan was transformed by hospitality seeing how her own parents practiced it. She also calls it her gift and that she can't be who she is unless she practices it! Hospitality is the way





WELCOMING
THE STRANGER: LIVING
OUT GOD'S SOUL
STRETCHING LOVE

JAN JOHNSON



In this article Jan discusses the importance of welcoming the stranger, and in so doing creating a “home” for them. Jesus himself identified with the stranger in his statement “when I was a stranger you welcomed me”. This is a poignant reminder that when we welcome strangers we are welcoming Jesus himself. This welcoming posture is not just a warm feeling, but actually is something we must learn to do and ought to have practical results in terms of meeting the needs of those we welcome. Even in the Old Testament welcoming the stranger was a command; often it was the Israelites themselves who were strangers and sojourners and who needed to be welcomed. In the parable of the Good Samaritan it is clear that the stranger (the unclean sinner from the Jewish perspective) is the one who shows hospitality to the wounded traveler. Not the priest, or the Levite, but the stranger who himself has been ostracized, has learned empathy for others who are left by the side of the road. Jan challenges the reader to reach out to all people (as God has reached out to the entire world) even those who don't belong to our “own group”. This welcoming reach must extend to outcasts (those unacceptable in normal society like

that both Eugene and Janice live out their faith. It is a reciprocal process as hosting people is as much a blessing to them as it is to the guest. As we extend ourselves to make holy space for others, so the other person extends to open up himself or herself to God's grace. Grace is in every dimension of hospitality. Finally, Christian hospitality is done for God and making space for others actually creates space for God himself.

1. What is risky about hospitality? What is inconvenient?
2. Do you practice hospitality easily, or is it difficult? Discuss what factors make it easy or difficult for you.
3. What is the greatest act of hospitality you have ever shown? Did you receive anything from this experience?
4. How might God be present as you extend yourself to create “holy space” for another?

INVITING OTHERS IN

CINDY BUNCH



Cindy begins this article gratefully recalling that in a time of crisis she and her infant son were graciously offered a place to stay in the home of her supervisor at work and his wife. This was a common practice for Andy and his wife Phyllis who demonstrated hospitality to many in transition and difficulty. Their style was relaxed and unstressed providing both privacy and openness. Cindy truly felt welcomed in their home. This stood in bold contrast to Cindy's church family that seemed

to abandon her at this time when she needed them the most.

Cindy then describes how this negative experience with the church was redeemed as she began to care for Shelly who had ALS. Shelly was a founding member of her church and she did a great deal of work volunteering in ministry. (One of the things she did was to provide hospitality on the holidays to those who didn't have a place to go.) Cindy cared for Shelly as her ALS progressed, and when she died Cindy found that Shelly had left her with some very important gifts. The first gift was an increased sense of confidence in her ability to be a caregiver. Cindy had never been in this type of situation before and Shelly patiently coached her through. In caring for Shelly, Cindy also experienced the gift of peace. Others caring for Shelley experienced this as well. Cindy saw this as the gift of Jesus' presence with her in the process of caring. The gift of trust was given, as Shelly opened her home and trusted Cindy and others to care for her. And finally, for the whole church community, Shelly gave the gift of trust. She opened her home and trusted those who came to care for her to function as the body of Christ in action. Even hospice staff were amazed at what was happening as the church people took shifts, provided for Shelley's needs on a variety of levels and worked together. This trusting relationship that Shelly had in the church, inspired Cindy to once again trust the church body that is called together to offer care and support to those in need.

1. Have you ever cared for someone in need and received back more than what you gave? What gifts have you received?
2. How was Shelly showing hospitality to those who cared for her?
3. Shelly showed a special strength in being willing to receive. Is it easier for you to give or to receive? How might your willingness to receive from others bless them?
4. What kinds of experiences cause people to distrust the church? What kinds of experiences foster trust?

