

## From “Homey” to “Holy”

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Luke 24:13-31

Today we are focusing on the ministry of hospitality that goes beyond the conventional definition of hospitality, which seems to emphasize luxury/comfort. But for Jesus, hospitality went far beyond this definition to include other elements, which were intended to be life changing and holy or sacred.

Last July 15, Anita and I began our year-long assignment as host couple at the International Guest House, a ministry of Christian hospitality in D.C. begun by this congregation in conjunction with Allegheny Conference some 45 years ago. (This is turning out to be one of the richest years of our life!) This is very consistent with the basic DNA of your congregation, which is that of welcoming everyone in the name of Christ and sharing God’s love with all who come thru your doors!

To give us a history of how it all began, I am asking Gene Miller, presently a member of the IGH Board and longtime member of this congregation, to come and share:

(Gene shares, Andy asks questions, recognizing Annabelle’s over 35 years involvement.)

As I reflect on the story of the two disciples sharing hospitality with Jesus, both on the road and in their home, I note several interesting things:

- By the end of the account, hospitality had evolved into a mutual giving/receiving, and the distinction between guest and host no longer mattered! A sense of

“family” or “safe community” is created, where all are accepted and valued, none excluded.

- It was in the sharing around the table, that the two disciples finally understood what Jesus had been trying so diligently to tell them; an insight that did not need words or language to communicate. They needed to find healing for their hurting hearts!
  - In the final scene, the “homelike” atmosphere they tried so hard to create was transformed into a “holy” moment, when they recognized it was in fact Christ!  
Now let’s talk about IGH and its ministry of hospitality!
1. In our activities around breakfast, tea and cookies in the evening, and all the “housekeeping” things we do like dusting, cleaning, laundry, making beds, baking muffins for breakfast and cookies for evening tea, giving directions on which bus to take where, we attempt to create a sense of community, which minimizes the roles of “host and guest,” and we are in fact a new family created for even just that one day or week to include all the guests who wish to be included. We are more than just a hostel where people come to sleep! We often get feedback, which indicates how people appreciate this “intangible” ingredient! We are enriched by each person who comes!

For example:

- A family from Algiers moving to the USA: Kenya, Fouzi and Maya, December 2011
- Phyllis Terwilliger’s guest book entry, Jan. 31, 2012
- Review on BedandBreakfast.com, Apr. 13

2. We seek to maintain a “healing atmosphere” of loving acceptance of everyone who comes. We take time to listen to people’s stories and learn from them. We attempt to be living witnesses in all we do; to guide discussion in positive ways, which often focus around non-violence, peacemaking, spirituality, faith and our Mennonite/Anabaptist heritage.

For example:

- Bill Strunk, my predecessor as host, told me the most often asked question was “What is a Mennonite?” and to answer it in three simple sentences or less!
- Merydith Willoughby, Australia (She claimed to be agnostic when she came!)
- Like our brochure says, to be a “home away from home!”
- So we interact both by our speaking and sharing, but also by our presence, a sense of acceptance and healing that goes beyond words and is communicated in our actions!

3. We try to create an atmosphere in which God’s spirit can invade our activities and transform our efforts of hospitality into holy moments:

For example:

- Ada Schrock’s journal, 1986/1987! Well, Ada, thousands upon thousands of angels have come to IGH; in fact, we try to see God in every guest who comes thru our door. (Sometimes we have to look a bit longer!) And we hope they will see Jesus in us!
- Family from Connecticut, just Friday morning, who sat around the breakfast table for an hour, telling us about their experience recently of adopting two girls (9&5). One was from China, the second from Vietnam, and otherwise would have been

limited to a life in a crowded orphanage, but they are creating a “family” for them. They have interrupted their careers in midlife, given their financial savings, etc. Isn't that another version of the salvation story? In the devotion time that morning, Merlin had referenced this Luke 24 text and indicated that Jesus would be present around our table that morning and each mealtime if we ask him to be! Little did we know how that would be illustrated in just a few minutes, around that breakfast table!

I wish to thank you as a congregation for your support of IGH and opening the door for more connection to happen! We welcome individuals or couples to come help us on a busy weekend or to give three months to a year in service. Small groups are also welcome to meet with us sometime or a work team to come and help for a day. We also invite you to bring your family and join us for tea and cookies some evening to ‘experience’ IGH.