

## Strangers

### From the Bethany Lutheran Church Health and Wellness Cabinet

*“Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some people have entertained angels without knowing it.” – (Hebrews 13:2)*

Strangers can be scary. They are people we don't know. We are taught as children that we must never go off with or talk to strangers, and there is even a school curriculum called “Stranger Danger” that teaches these things. It's sound advice, of course. If we are vulnerable, there are, unfortunately, people in the world who might take advantage of us. Even as adults we maintain a reasonable caution about people we don't know.

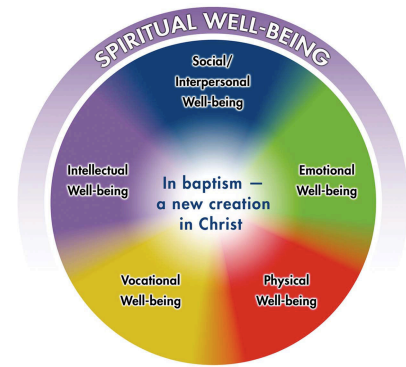
As adults, though, “strangers” is a relative term to us -- come to think of it, there really are people we associate with in our neighborhoods and workplaces all the time who are still strangers to us, aren't there? And it is true that part of our path to emotional and spiritual health is in connecting with other people in the world. So do we have enough people in our lives? What about those others in the community who are beyond our circle of trusted friends?

I was fortunate to be able to travel this summer, and met people from many different places. Despite the need for caution that one must have when in strange surroundings and especially when in a place where one's own language is not common, I found that God still provided opportunities to interact more closely with some complete strangers along the way, to see what we could learn from each other.

On their own initiative some provided me with needed direction on finding good things to eat, finding my way, or even finding enlightenment about local culture away from the usual tourist places. They dared to reach out to me, not knowing what reaction they would get, and when I risked some openness, listened and expressed my gratitude, suddenly we were not complete strangers anymore. One returned my gratitude with the simple phrase, “God is good.”

Whether a person we are with is a stranger is partly in our control, I think. And it really doesn't carry as much risk as it may seem. It has to do with trying something as simple as a friendly greeting, or even more simply, not turning away from someone just because we don't know them. As Francis Bacon said, “If a man be gracious and courteous to strangers, it shows he is a citizen of the world.” Sometimes the results can be pretty miraculous. Other times your greeting may be met with silence. Either is an acceptable outcome to your expression of caring.

As the scripture above notes, some strangers are sent to provide for us. But the passage also appears to imply that we can act as *providers* as part of our role of being a member of God's larger community. As has been mentioned in our Bethany publications, September 12<sup>th</sup> this year is the focus of the national “Back to Church” initiative. (See <http://backtochurch.com/> for more information.) Which provides a great opportunity to make some strangers less strange! Don't be a stranger. – JL



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