



By Neil Sagebeil:

Welcome to the Stranger

In 2003 I was a stranger in a foreign land. Our family had moved from a West Coast city to a one-stoplight town in the Blue Ridge Mountains. The welcome began. Through the years kindness took many forms.

Neighbors arrived at our door: greeting us, bringing flowering plants, offering help of all kinds. Church members carried casseroles up our driveway.

Our 80-year-old next-door neighbor told us all about our house—it had been his brother’s house for a half century. He gave our daughter money for a good report card and came to our back door with candy for both girls during holidays. Once he mowed our sloping acre on a faulty riding mower when we were gone. (And he no longer mowed his own yard!)

There were years of friendly waves as we traveled county roads and offers of a ride whenever I walked anywhere in town. And there were years of friendly conversations at the grocery store and post office.

Along with us, our small community watched our daughters grow up, and it knew and nurtured them in ways that were deeply personal.

In a real sense, I was always a stranger—not from there, a “come-lately,” even after 15 years. But my family and I were always welcomed.

PRAYER*

LORD JESUS, help us to welcome the stranger, and thereby welcome you. Stay with us. Be our companion in the way, kindle our hearts, and awaken hope, that we may know you and your love for all humankind. Amen.

*adapted in part from *The Book of Common Prayer*