

Madison Heights Christian Church  
(Disciples of Christ)  
149 Main Street  
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## MADISON HEIGHTS MESSENGER

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### The Offer of Hospitality

When strangers came into Abraham's neighborhood there had to be rules of conduct to know how to deal with people. When they were traveling, they were cut off from their networks of economic support. They were both vulnerable and dangerous. They might be thirsty, hungry, and desperate. When strangers came into the neighborhood, there was a danger that they may, out of their desperation, take from you what they need to survive and maybe even murder you and your family in the process.

In ancient Israel, the way you would handle these situations was that you in effect made them temporarily part of your family by inviting them to come and share a meal at your table. If they accepted your offer of hospitality then they were saying that they were, for the time that they were there, members of your family. Just like members of any household, they are absolutely morally committed to provide for the survival and the thriving of that household. So, for the time being, these strangers, by accepting your hospitality, are now saying "We are here in your area, we join ourselves to your family, and we make ourselves responsible for your safety and well being." So, there's a two sided endeavor with this offer of hospitality. It's both for the good of the vulnerable traveling stranger and for the good of your household.

A classic example of this is found in Genesis 18 and the appearance of strangers to Abraham and Sarah at their tent at the oaks of Mamre. Abraham looked up and saw three men. When he saw them he ran from the entrance of his tent to meet them out there away from his tent and family. He wanted to keep the men at a distance, away from his wife, his possessions, and his people. He bows down to the ground; he treats them as if they are his superiors. He says "My Lord, if I find favor with you please don't pass by your servant, let a little water be brought, wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree. Let me bring a little bread that you may refresh yourselves and after that you may pass on since you have come to your servant."

The critical moment is when Abraham encounters these strangers. He needs to know if they mean him harm or if they mean him well. So, Abraham offers them his hospitality. Abraham offers them food and drink at his table, then he waits anxiously for their response. When they respond with "Do as you have said" Abraham is relieved. He runs back to the tent to tell Sarah to prepare a feast. He doesn't have to be on guard or warn his people to watch out. Now, through this act of hospitality Abraham and Sarah spread a feast for strangers and incorporate them temporarily into their household.

These rules of mutual support are true within a household, between households, and within a community, town, or region. Mutual support is offered between the home and stranger; between natives and immigrants. Hospitality is rooted in the biblical understanding that God has created the world with more than enough for all to survive and thrive. Out of our confidence that we have in God's fundamental goodness and abundance in creation, we can be bold in generosity and sharing. We can be confident that we all have enough to survive and to thrive. The offer of hospitality plays out in the relationship between Israel and God and ultimately in the relationship between us, as the church, and the world that God has created.

George