

We Belong Away From Home

We were dropped off as dusk foreshadowed the coming night. We'd brought kerosene lanterns and a couple of cans of stew to heat on top of the wood-burning stove. We knew where we were on the map, but we didn't yet feel that we belonged there. While the outhouse was conveniently located, drinking water had to be hauled from afar, and our sleeping bags provided little cushion on the dirt floor.

Those were just the awkward logistical details. More substantial was our quest to uncover how to learn and serve as new residents of the Navajo Nation in New Mexico. As Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA) we approached the first night with anticipation and anxiety, determination and uncertainty. It is hard to believe it all hapened forty years ago.

Regrettably, I never learned more than a few words of the Navajo language. I remain perplexed even now by many social practices and puzzled about how an ancient culture can find equilibrium in our postmodern world. But, I came to know elders who were patient and confident teachers, I shared labor and laughs with contemporaries, and **I discovered that there are more ways to make a life and a living than we can comprehend if we don't stray from familiar neighborhoods.**

In the ensuing years, I have experienced a similar sense of "otherness" and the cultural distance that comes when stepping outside my comfort zones. Sometimes we are pulled by God's call, other times pushed by circumstances, or perhaps we just stumble over the lines that divide us. We may at times be more exhilarated or anxious, more arrogant or humble, more engaged or defensive. But no matter how we begin, we are surely changed by what happens to us.

I was recently at a church where my life experience and identity marked me as "other." I looked and felt different. Because their own commitments and character were first and foremost grounded in the love and light of Jesus Christ, the congregation made it apparent through generous signs of encouragement and hospitality that I belonged there even though it would never be my home.

As you read this issue of CR, grasp the ways the contributors are captivated by and revel in how God makes possible rich and transforming encounters across the boundary lines of class, cultural and theological identity, language group, and economic status. **The shape of our response and the integrity of our enlistment matters to our neighbors, to our congregations, to us, and to God.** I hope you find here an invitation and a compelling appeal to remember that one of the places we belong is walking side-by-side with God's people at the margins, in every place that we can, in all the ways that we can, and as often as we can.



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