



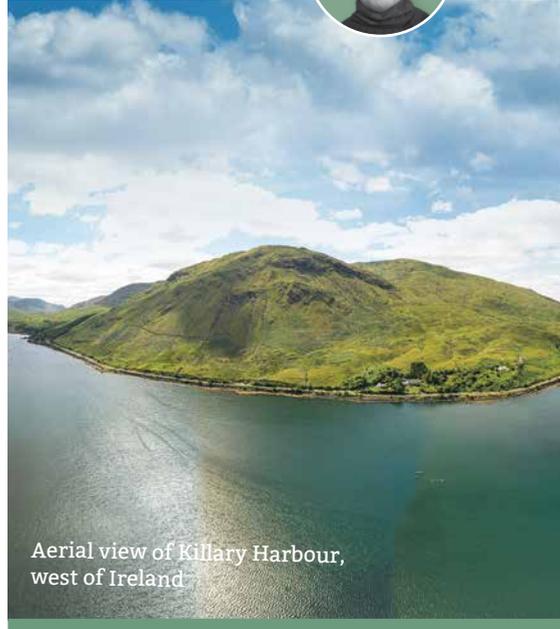
Welcoming the Stranger

Ann Marie Lee, regular contributor to *The Messenger*, recounts where there was 'room at the inn' in an ordinary, family situation.

While staying for a few days at a monastery in the West of Ireland, I met a young man named Hans, from a small village in rural Germany. He was training for the Lutheran Ministry. Part of this training involved working on a project outside his own country, and this was what brought him to Ireland.

About four months into his stay his fifteen-year-old sister, Maria, came to visit with him at the monastery. As can be imagined a monastery in a rural setting, no matter how beautiful, is not the most exciting place for a young girl to spend a holiday. After much pleading on her behalf, Hans decided to take his sister to Dublin for a few days to show her the sights before her holiday ended.

One morning at the breakfast table Hans asked if anyone knew of inexpensive accommodation at which he and his sister could stay in Dublin. I asked how long he intended to stay. When he said only a few days, I invited them to stay with me and my family. He was rather surprised at the offer and had questions. I answered his questions and asked him to think



Aerial view of Killary Harbour, west of Ireland

about it. I was aware that he was apprehensive and cautious in a strange land. Later that day he accepted the offer.

The two joined me on my journey home on the Saturday, chatting amicably, keeping me company as I drove. They told me a little about their family, their studies and what they hoped to do with their lives. Marie was terribly excited at the prospect of coming to Dublin.

Hans was a stoical, serious young man of about twenty-one. He was very protective of his sister. Marie was fun, full of life and curiosity. She wanted to see the sights, visit Temple Bar, the cinema, the shops and so on. He was willing to accompany her, but I felt it was on sufferance; he would prefer to be at his books or his music.

That evening after dinner, my



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daughters filled Marie in on the best places to go, and I looked up the nearest Lutheran Church. Hans had said that he hadn't met anyone of his religion since coming to Ireland. There was a Lutheran Church not far away, and I found out the time of the service for the next morning, Sunday. I offered to take them there. Hans was delighted and very surprised that a complete stranger would go to so much trouble for them.

Having stayed with us for the best part of a week they were returning by train to the monastery the next morning. Hans came to me, taking money from his wallet to pay me. I said, 'No, no, that's not the arrangement. You don't pay me. What you must do is pass this gift on to someone else when you are in a position to do so.' Hans was not a young man

to show emotion, but he sat down quickly on the nearest chair and put his face in his hands. I asked him if he was all right, he pulled himself together quickly and said, 'I was just thinking.' There were tears in his eyes. In his young life he had never come across this gift of hospitality, this type of Christian generosity before, and he was moved to tears by it.

Many years ago I read a book in which the main character, a refrigerator salesman, did good deeds for others and when offered payment, always refused saying the gift he had given was to be passed on. I don't remember the book title or the author but, whoever he was, he had a lasting influence on my life. For our gifts of hospitality over the years we, as a family, have been repaid a thousand-fold. 