



# CEDAR

Communities Engaging with  
Difference and Religion

## HOSPITALITY AND THE STRANGER

JULY 14-27, 2018

ABILENE, TEXAS (USA)

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH:



**HARDIN-SIMMONS**  
UNIVERSITY

Since 2003 [CEDAR—Communities Engaging with Difference and Religion](#) has been organizing experientially based educational programs all over the world in which participants from many nations and diverse backgrounds, known as fellows, learn how to live with difference in their respective communities. Together with its affiliates—the [Equator Peace Academy](#) in Uganda, the [Balkan Summer School on Religion and Public Life](#) in Bulgaria, and the [Nusantara School of Difference](#) in Indonesia—CEDAR seeks to create a space of interaction that moves fellows to new understandings of themselves, their taken-for-granted assumptions about the world, and their attitudes toward others they may see as threatening, even dangerous. CEDAR programs strive to provide new, transferable skills that participants can use in their home settings as tools for negotiating difference and coping with the discomfort that difference often invokes.

Following the American election cycle of 2016, political scientists and pollsters have argued that the U.S. is more politically polarized than any time since the Civil War. Many find themselves increasingly unable to relate to their fellow citizens, viewing them in fact as strangers. In some respects, this reflects the long-term effects of the 1965 Hart-Celler Act, which put an end to decades of U.S. immigration policies organized along racial lines for the purpose of maintaining a specific idea of white, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant American homogeneity. In the past half century, the cultural, ethnic, and religious makeup of the U.S. shifted in significant ways. This shift and its consequences were a prime subject in the election of 2016 and continue to engage Americans of all walks of life.

Living among people whom we view as strangers, we are continually challenged by the demands of hospitality, whether as providers or recipients. What do our religious, moral, or political communities teach about encountering strangers? What resources for tolerance exist within our religious, moral, and political traditions to deal with the stranger? Can we live with their differences, even as they live among us? Living at peace in a world populated by different people with different political ideas, moral traditions, religious commitments, and communal loyalties requires that we answer these questions. Do we have the courage to do so?

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If so, we must call upon the moral resources of our different communities and discover strategies to bear the anxiety and fear that our encounters with difference—with the stranger and with their ways—so often evoke. To explore these questions, we will gather in the town of Abilene (pop. 120,000), in the Big Country region of west-central Texas. Established as a cattle town along the Texas and Pacific railroad in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, modern Abilene’s economy rests on a combination of educational institutions, healthcare facilities, petroleum engineering, wind energy, and the Dyess Air Force base. Abilene contains three universities, a community college, and three technical colleges. It is home to a substantial population of central African refugees, as well as to a wide variety of religious communities. While evangelical Protestants make up the vast majority of Abilene’s religious landscape, Abilene is also home to Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu, Mormon, Adventist, and various mainline Protestant communities.

*Hospitality and the Stranger* will seek to build a cohort of fellows representative of the many aspects of contemporary American life. In addition, room will also be made for international fellows, whose unique perspectives contribute much to these experiences. In order to assemble this cohort of fellows, folks connected to CEDAR’s national and international network of scholars, activists, community and religious leaders, as well as leaders from the Big Country’s local religious organizations, universities, businesses, non-profits, and other community institutions are especially encouraged to apply. By bringing together both those from within and outside the cultural milieu of west-central Texas, we hope to facilitate robust encounters with difference amid the increasingly toxic nature of quarantined political and cultural discourse in America.

As noted above, our schools do not stress any idea of “common ground” or shared values among participants. Rather, they are predicated on the existence of substantive differences—in values, histories, life circumstances, beliefs, worldviews, and economic statuses—between individuals and communities; differences that naturally resist elision. The school seeks to build a space in which a sense of shared belonging becomes possible despite those deep differences in lived experience. *Its focus is on belonging rather than rights.*

The program will combine lectures, experiential learning, and group work for an intensive period of challenging our own taken-for-granted assumptions about the lives of others and their experience of the world. Members of the different communities represented will share their stories and perspectives on the concrete issues at stake in sharing a life with “strangers.” Fellows will further have concrete opportunities to both offer and receive hospitality as they engage in shared physical activities and various hands-on programs—in neighborhoods, religious communities, and among refugees and different community groups. All activities will take place in conjunction with daily lectures of a more academic nature on topics of racial and ethnic relations, the role of the Church, issues of social isolation, immigration, law enforcement challenges in the United States, and others.

*Hospitality and the Stranger* is a joint project between CEDAR and [Hardin-Simmons University](#). Deadline for applications is March 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2018. Applications can be found at [www.CEDARnetwork.org](#). We look forward to you joining us!