

## **HOSPITALITY: A COOL PLACE TO HANG OUT**

**By Bob Young**

When we moved into the first house that we owned (after living in church parsonages for nine years), we were committed to making our home a joyful chaos of visitors sharing love, fellowship, and good times. Chaos was often the right word as guests overflowed onto the deck and into the basement family room; and young people turned our great outdoors into a space for football, basketball, running and playing.

Opening our home meant making room for lots of folks and cooking lots of food. We cherished times of sharing, satisfaction, and spiritual connections. In a world characterized by conflict, challenges, fractured relationships, and lack of trust, we sought the opposite.

We and our boys harbor precious memories. A young couple arriving in town and attending church for the first time on Christmas Day. They were separated from family—come to our house! After sharing Christmas dinner, our sons made sure that our guests also had a gift under the tree.

A holiday tradition developed so that we hosted all the widows in the church in our home between Thanksgiving and Christmas. Our sons served the meals as Jan and I sought to be gracious host and hostess.

Thanksgiving became a day when church members with no family nearby were invited to spend Thanksgiving at our house.

One time a group of guests arrived at 10 PM, just in time to go enjoy the all-night toboggan run that was on a few miles from our house, and come back around midnight for hot chocolate.

Memories—youth groups, ladies' groups, small groups, families, friends.

When guests came to our home, we wanted our home to be place to connect, laying aside self-interests and needs, putting away self-reliance. Home – intimacy, being heard, making a difference. Authenticity. Transparency. A member of the youth group said it well, "I am afraid to let you know who I really am, because if you know who I am, you might not like me."

Our home became for others a haven – be yourself, authentic, even in fragility and brokenness. Surely God wants us to find safe spaces at places other than down at the church house! Safety, security, satisfaction, sufficiency, sustenance.

Not long ago, we opened our home to a small group of Christians for a time of fellowship, sharing, study, singing, and food. The dozen or so folks present lingered...and lingered...and lingered. When the time came to end the delightful evening, one dear sister remarked, "Your house is a cool place to hang out!"

Spending time at our house is never a test, never counting visits. We just like savoring your company. Forget the grab and go. We like the leisure and lingering. It is a part of growing in compassion and love.

Think with me. I have written about Bob and Jan's home. Think about our spiritual home—the church. Or any gathering of hearts. Not about the activity, but about who is present. A time to give and a time to receive. Connect. With one another. With our God. Do not miss the grandeur. This is a cool place to hang out! This is a cool group of folks to hang out with!