“When you search for information on the web for hospitality, most of the results focus on the hospitality industry. The word hospitality is derived from the Latin hospes, which refers to guest and host, as well as a stranger or foreigner. It gave rise to the French word, hospice, which meant to provide for the weary and to take care of those traveling.

Hospitality is an ancient custom that always was incumbent on households to provide. With the breakdown of the Roman Empire, public hospitality fell to the monasteries of religious orders, which was in keeping with the Christian tradition of hospitality.

The basis for Christian hospitality is found in Matthew 25:35-36, where Jesus said, “For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.’

Henry Brinton writes in his book, The Welcoming Congregation, “Every time people sit down to eat and drink together, there is the possibility that community will grow and people will be reconciled to one another. This is good news for a fractured and polarized world, and a strong sign of the importance of being a welcoming congregation that embraces all people....” In his book, he writes about the roots of hospitality: facility, worship, meals, and small groups. For Brinton, the fruits of hospitality are reconciliation, outreach, and new perceptions of religion.

The focus on hospitality by religion is also captured in architecture which features a sanctuary. While the initial meaning of this space was a “building set apart for holy worship,” by 1560 the meaning had expanded to include a “place of refuge or protection.” The New Sanctuary Movement (NSM) emerged in 2007. As work place and neighborhood raids escalated, congregations opened their doors to provide refuge to those facing deportation. The number of congregations involved is estimated to be between 700 and 1,000. (The modern-day American sanctuary movement began in 1982 when six congregations in California and Arizona offered to protect undocumented Central American immigrants who were fleeing their war-torn countries. This idea of sanctuary first emerged in congregations in the United States in the years before the Civil War when the Underground Railroad came into being to help slaves flee the South and find safety in the North.) While opinions vary about NSM, it is clear that the immigration system is terribly broken and would benefit from increased grassroots activism to bring about effective solutions.

It is notable that hospitality touches in deep ways a number of topics that continue to challenge society. This includes how we deal with strangers, which comprise most of our world, sometimes even our “neighbors,” as well as the refugee, the immigrant, the homeless, others on the margins. Strangers consist of most of those who are outside of our tribe however narrowly or broadly we may define it. The dynamics of exclusion are influenced by race, religion, class, political affiliation and a lot more.”

- Touchstones - Hospitality October 2017