

MORE THAN JUST POLITE

It's no secret that I'm a big fan of thank you notes. I like sending them. I like getting them. I even keep a file of thank you notes I've received in the past.

One of my all-time favorites came from Rose Jordan about five years ago. I had spoken at the board meeting of Christian Community Action. It is one of the agencies our mission board supports and Rose served on its board for many years. She was writing to thank me for taking the time to meet with them and offered some very kind words about my brief meditation on gratitude. She also expressed her appreciation for our church.

"It's so easy," she wrote, "to take our many blessings for granted as you pointed out. Yesterday I stopped to think about some of the things I have to be thankful for. Thanks for reminding me."

I suppose we all need to be reminded from time to time. Like children caught up in the excitement of new toys after Christmas, sometimes we need to be prodded into offering up our words of thanksgiving.

Children, of course, are taught to write thank you notes to Aunt Millie and Uncle Bud because it's the courteous thing to do. But the truth is, saying thank you, is not just courteous. Indeed, saying thank you is more than just polite. Far more. For ultimately, it is a powerful way we acknowledge that we are part of a larger whole. It is a powerful way of acknowledging that we are dependent on others for our own well-being—even our own existence.

My friend Phyllis used to celebrate her *own* birthday by sending a dozen roses to her mother. It was her way of saying "Thanks Mom, for giving me life!" Her mother lived well into her eighties, and when she died, Phyllis was beside herself. And on her first birthday after her mother's death, she was especially distraught, for a tradition had passed on as well.

But then, a few months later, there came a knock at her door. When she opened it her son Bob was standing there. "Thanks, Mom," he said as he handed her a bouquet. It was *his* birthday. Those roses were his thank you note for life.

I recently acquired a wonderful book called *Dear Mr. President*. It is a collection of letters written to various presidents from Washington to Clinton. Some are funny, some are touching—a few are even infuriating.

Most of us here are too young to remember a time before Social Security. It is hard for most of us to imagine how it transformed old age, widowhood and disability.

Petra Harthun was a widow living during the depression. Her ability to live a life with some measure of dignity was made possible by Social Security. And she was extremely grateful for

the difference it made in her life. So she wrote a thank you note—she sent it to Eleanor Roosevelt, in the hope she would pass it on to the President.

“Dear First Lady,” she wrote, “I am a widow, my husband died nine months ago, and since then I have received, my Social Security each month, fifteen dollars and ninety three cents.

“I want to express my thankfulness to our President for being the means of this big help in being able to carry on. My son and his little girl lives (*sic*) with me, he is a telegraphist by trade, but being unable to find that kind of work, is at present working for the railroad at 43 cents an hour, 8 hour a day. We would have to part, go each our own way, if it were not for this money that help (*sic*) us pay the rent, \$25.00 a month.

“Please forward my deep appreciation.

“I am yours respectfully, Petra Engebretson Harthun (63)

It is good to say thank you. To our parents, to our nation, and, especially, to God.

The ancient Israelites understood the importance of saying thank you. The book of Psalms is full of expressions of gratitude. It contains, if you will, all manner of thank you notes. Our text today is just one of many such examples. It was probably a hymn sung as the Israelites entered the Temple for worship. As they marched into the courtyard, with all it’s reminders of the majesty of God, they offered up songs of praise and thanksgiving. “For the Lord is good,” they sang, “God’s steadfast love endures forever, and God’s faithfulness to all generations.” (100:5)

Last year we celebrated our 175th anniversary. Again and again we were reminded of the truth of that very proclamation. As we remembered the various people and events of our past, we were prompted to give thanks to God! Saugatuck Congregational Church knows first hand that God’s love is steadfast. Saugatuck Congregational Church knows firsthand that God’s faithfulness *has* been to all generations.

Not least of which, ours. And we are here this morning to offer up our own psalm of thanksgiving. We are here this morning to hand God a thank you note. For once again, as we have moved through this Capital Campaign, we have seen the generosity of God expressed in the generosity of our fellow congregants.

Yesterday, the New York Times published yet another article declaring that a recession was now inevitable. From sub-prime mortgages losses to an unstable market, the economic bad news seems never ending. Yet in the midst of that, folks have filled out their pledge cards and written their letters of intent to support the future of this congregation, to further our ability to live our vision. I thank each and every one of you has done so already, and those of you who will do so in the days ahead. It is as if you are writing a thank you note to God!

This week I received a copy of a letter written by two former members of our congregation. Dave Dewetter and John Shaw moved from Westport a few years back. But during their time

here they were one of the most respected couples in our congregation. And they were deeply involved in the life of the church. John and Dave wanted to say thank you. Thank you to Saugatuck, and more importantly, thank you to God. So they made a pledge to the Capital Campaign. With their permission, I share their letter.

“[T]he church was very important to us during the several years we lived in Westport. Saugatuck was our spiritual home and remains so in many ways.

“We appreciated the respect accorded us individually and as a couple. We appreciated the many opportunities to serve with joy—whether in the bell choir or on various committees. We appreciated the strong sense of community, the small groups, the beach services, and—of course—our many friendships.

“We treasure our years at Saugatuck and joyfully accept the opportunity to help ensure that our beloved church continues to thrive for future generations.

“We would like to celebrate the 175th anniversary of the church by pledging a gift of \$100 per year of the life of the church. We will pay our gift of \$17,500 in monthly installments beginning with this letter.

“Thank you for the opportunity to add to the legacy of those who came before and who cherished Saugatuck as we do.

“Blessings to all,

John Shaw and David Dewetter.”

John and David’s wonderful gift is just one of so many wonderful gifts—some folks could afford far less, and some far more. But each gift was and is a thank you note. A dear and precious thank you note to God.

For the Lord has been good to Saugatuck. In generations past, and in our own. And it is more than just polite to say thank you—it is a powerful way of acknowledging our dependence on the Holy One.

Thank you all—and thank you God!

Amen
John H. Danner