



# The Mirror

**The Congregational Church of Excelsior**

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## **From the Pastor**

As October turns to November, we are greeted and blessed by Ross's now annual Harvest Dinner, (which only he and Tina know how to do with consummate gourmet excellence!). But we (also) celebrate the holiday of all Congregational holidays, (second only to Ross & Tina's....if only the Pilgrims had known about it in 1720 they would've left Provincetown for Excelsior instead of Plymouth, and Minnesota as well as CCoE would've been discovered much earlier!), which also happens to be the holiday of all American holidays (perhaps next only to the 4th of July, although I personally think it's first!)---none other than Thanksgiving, of course! And, in keeping with sound Pilgrim tradition, Thanksgiving is meant to be celebrated in a simple fashion, (although the food ultimately turns out to be a quite lavish feast), around your dining room table surrounded by your intimate family and friends, (although, at least for this year, out of necessity, properly socially-distanced in order to avoid your Thanksgiving from appearing as the lead story on the front page of the Star Tribune because it became a "super-spreader event"--God forbid!). And churches will sing the tried, (if not also tired), and true old Pilgrim hymn, "We Plow the Fields and Scatter," which declares that: "All good gifts around us are sent from heaven above / Then thank the Lord, O thank the Lord, for all his love."

All of which makes November, and the Thanksgiving season, the perfect time to express our deepest gratitude for all God's good and abundant gifts to us (including even those which, at first blush, do not appear to be so). And just as the natural tone of thankfulness, and its first cousin gratitude, is humility, humility's "natural movement" involves simplicity. And what, in particular, is simplicity's "natural movement?" It means that gratitude leads from our first thanking God, directly to the act of returning to God, through the milieu of the real world which God has created us an intrinsic part of, a generous portion (& I mean not just a portion, but a *generous* portion which springs from our deepest gratitude for all God's blessings to us personally. And that implicitly means we now recognize that all that we have received belongs to God in the first place (there are no deeds

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nor land plats in the kingdom of heaven). This is no less than an emotional and spiritual chain reaction from the mundane to the sacred.

But, what if, instead of a linear chain reaction, it's more like a circular spiral of joy? Now we're talking about the guts of what it means to be a good steward. Solely from the perspective of a one's experience of this important aspect of the Christian "spiritual journey," the inner-workings of stewardship involve the process---or more accurately, consist of one's feelings of rising higher & higher (which even economists, of all people, recognize, and they even have a name for it---a "virtuous cycle" in which the economy, or stock market, builds on its own momentum, seemingly sans any external, "fundamental" focus to justify its rise.)

Now, I think the priest, Father David Stendl-Rast has best captured the essence of this "virtuous circle" in practical terms that we can all understand. He says that it all starts with taking the time necessary to really see and to listen. He states that, seeing and listening and taking time, produce gratitude. And gratitude produces thanksgiving. And this sense of thanksgiving that produces a gift which does not primarily address the gift itself, but the giver of the gift. In this process there is what we might call a 'spiral of joy' in which the giver receives thanksgiving, and then is transformed into the gift." And to clarify what he means, he goes on to say that, "A mother bends down to her child in the crib and hands the baby a rattle. The baby recognizes the gift, and returns the gift with a smile. Then the mother, overjoyed by her baby's expression of gratitude, lifts her baby up with a kiss. So, is not the

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kiss not the greater gift than the toy? Is not the joy that the kiss expresses, greater than the joy that set the whole spiral in motion?"

So I ask you: who in their right mind wouldn't want to experience a spiral of joy? All of which means that stewardship should be a snap---a no-brainer, a slam-dunk. Right? Moreover, wouldn't it also mean that anyone who professes to have faith in Jesus Christ would eagerly, and enthusiastically, want---no yearn, to engage in this spiral of joy called stewardship. And I'm not even speaking parochially from the standpoint of promoting the continuing existence of the church. Stewardship, of all sorts, would be a daily constant in our lives---and not just a once-a-year painstaking exercise in begging people to "do the right thing by God" and "give 'til it hurts."

So, as you decide your stewardship priorities for 2021 (out of the multitude of worthy causes that the mail brings to your doorstep every day), first take the time to see the world around you and to listen to your heart---and, in the midst of that process, remember to remember all that you have received, and who gave it to you, to not only survive but to thrive. And when you finally take stock, I think that you will remember that the church has always been, and is, here for you, probably like few others in your life who know you personally and care about you and your well-being (as any church worth its salt would and should).

And if you're stuck, start by turning to the words of the Psalmist (in the 103rd), who told us to, "Never forget all God's benefits." Then ask yourself the next, obvious question: Why? Why does God even bother to bestow these "benefits" on us? What's God's reason? And the Psalmist has an answer for that one too (which when you think about it, is the icing on the cake of joy): "So that your youth is restored like the eagles'."

But guess what? Unless you have a Bible open on your lap, I just tricked you! The injunction to "never forget all God's benefits" is not the beginning of the Psalmist's reminder. It comes after a coma. What comes before, and leads up to this conclusion is a reminder of what it is right and necessary to do first: to "Bless the Lord, O my soul, with all that is within me, bless his holy name." Yes, stewardship is ultimately about blessing God for all that God has given, is giving, and will give, in our fragile, mortal lives. Stewardship is what makes the circle of God's love complete.

With the greatest of hope,

Rev. Tom

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## **Board of Deacons**

The Deacons Thank You if you filled out and submitted the questionnaire from the October Mirror. Your input was needed to figure out how CCOE moves forward at this difficult time. The results are included in this issue.

November 1 is a Special day! It's the beginning of Central Standard Time when we move clocks back one hour.

ALSO, it's the day you don't have to cook dinner, because you can order and pick up a Harvest Dinner to go for each member of your dining group. Thanks to the Rogne family for instigating this fund raiser! Each dinner is \$15 for adults and \$8 for children: Smoked pork, Roasted vegetables, Mashed redskin potatoes,

rolls and dessert. Please place your orders and send payment ASAP.

The Board of Deacons,

Nancy Benson, Julie Boden, Betty Kuechle, Carolyn Leaf, Val Stuessi, Judy Wise.



## **CCoE Survey – Return to Church Services**

The recent survey reported most people would rather wait to return to live church services until the pandemic was under control. Many people, however, stated how much they missed coming to church. A few people do come on Sunday mornings to hear Lydia's music and to watch the Zoom in progress. For those who also wish to attend the Sunday service, follow the safety plan by using hand sanitizer, wearing a mask, and maintaining social distancing.

### **Q1 Are you eager to attend church services on site?**

Yes	12
No	16
Maybe	4

### **Q2 If no, when would you feel comfortable to come back?**

When vaccine is available  
When older members will be able to get the vaccine  
When cold/flu season is over next March  
When MN covid case/death rate falls to non pandemic rate  
Not til it's safe  
When social distancing and masks are required for all  
When we have a full time minister on-site  
When vaccine is available and members can access it  
When restrictions are removed to groups greater than 25  
Maybe 1x/month in church building  
More comfortable when numbers are closer to 10/100,000 in Carver Cty  
Not eager, but would attend  
Would not be comfortable if positivity rate is still going up  
Attend with masks and spacing  
Can't stand wearing a mask - not sure they help anyway  
When my doctors say it's safe  
Church is large and number of people is small

### **Q3 If you come back, would you prefer to have a pastor on site?**

Yes	19
No	2

### **Q4 Would you want on-site services wth Tom on screen?**

Yes	3
No	19

### **Q5 Rather stay home and use Zoom**

Yes	17
No	6

## **Board of Missions**

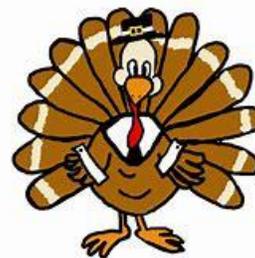
The church building itself may seem pretty quiet these days, but there's a lot of action going on behind the scenes, at least with the Missions Board!

Thanks to your wonderful generosity, we've (at this writing) already collected enough funds to purchase the makings for **holiday turkey dinners** for more than 30 local families through ICA's annual fall program. Wonderful!

And speaking of ICA, our church has received funds from you generous CCoE donors of over \$3,000 in the past year, much of it just recently. Remember, ICA helps clients not only with food but also with bridge funds for housing costs and help with finding employment. Requests to the organization for rental assistance have risen a whopping 6-fold this year. Your hearts should be full knowing the good you're doing for people short on money for food and housing during the challenging times we're in.

Get out your calendar and mark Monday, November 30, as **Maynard's ICA Day**, a tradition the Excelsior institution is staying with even in this very difficult year. All proceeds, and they mean **all** (*not* just profit!), from food and beverages served throughout the day go to ICA. Hours are 11 a.m. through midnight, and reservations (which are needed for in-person dining) open November 1. If you're not into going out to eat, and of course the restaurant's capacity is quite limited at the moment, how about ordering food for **takeout**? Those proceeds are added to the day's total too!

**Resource West**, a nonprofit agency in Hopkins that helps low-income families and individuals in the west metro area become "more connected, more resourceful, and more hopeful about their future," according to their website, has gratefully received more than 15 warm, puffy winter jackets



(plus hats, gloves, and scarves) for kids from our church family. See the photo for just some of them!

**Tree House**, another of the organizations our church supports, held a large lunch-hour virtual fund-raiser on October 9 with TV's Julie Nelson as emcee. Marty Swain and Val Stuessi attended (from the comfort of their homes) and heard speaker Mauri Melander Friesleben, principal at North High, describe the three suggestions she has for all of us to feed into Tree House's goal of ending hopelessness in youth:

- Ground yourself in hope
- Identify what steals your hope
- Speak hope to all you encounter

You can listen to Ms. Friesleben's message for hope by going to You Tube. Search by her name and/or her message "Love Them First." You'll find the documentary that's been done about her as well as her appearance on the Today Show describing it. It's powerful!

Thank you to our loyal, giving church family for your continued support of the many calls for help we issue.

Thank you so much from Missions!

Marty Swain (chair), Mark Krueger, Kathy Sherwood, Ross Rogney

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## **Music Notes**

Giving thanks! November is always a month of remembering for me because it's the month my parents married and the month they both died. My twin sister and I would not be in the world but for the love they shared and gave to us. THANKS GIVING is a part of each day God unfolds mysteries beyond our cares - the pandemic, election/politics, absence and presence of those we love. Let's give thanks together and sing #41 in our New Century Hymnal: "I thank you, Jesus (repeat), my Savior God, for you brought me, yes, you brought me from a mighty long way. You've been my father, been my mother, been my sister, my brother too, for you brought me, yes, you brought me from a mighty long way!" (African-American testimony hymn emphasizing God's delivering people from the tribulations of life. Tune written in 1948 by Kenneth Morris and needed in 2020!)

Thank you, God, for helping us moves forward in love for a mighty long way!

Lydia

## **Board of Christian Education**

We are giving thanks for a productive and fun Kick It on Sunday, Oct. 18. The gardening committee (Thanks!!!) helped the kids plant bulbs around the church. The kids drew chalk messages on the sidewalks and had an outdoor game of hide and seek. It was wonderful to see everyone! Thanks to all who helped out and all who attended!!

Our next Kick It event will be making Nativity Scenes on Nov. 15. The quilters helped Janet H. prepare the felt figures. Kids glue them on wood pieces. We will send more information on how we will be assembling the pieces! This is a three-year project! Joseph, Mary, Jesus and an angel this year. A shepherd, cow, donkey and sheep next year. And wise men in year three. Let Janet know if you have any extra 2x4 boards of untreated pine.

The October Sunday School packets were sent out and kids will be able to work on them at home. Pen Pals this month shared a story about a time they were scared and asked God for help.

## **Upcoming events**

Some of our young people will be helping to deliver Harvest Dinner meals during our drive-through event on Nov. 1.

Our Christmas program is set for Sunday, Dec. 20. Ben and Janet will put the video together. Parents will get scripts before Thanksgiving. Everyone will be able to get creative with their costumes. We're hoping to have kids record music. Get ready for an exciting presentation!

We will be adopting a family for Christmas through the ICA Food Shelf to provide them Christmas gifts. The recent ICA Food Drive brought in a lot of food plus \$782 - a huge success!

Please continue to join us for Zoom church. The children's message is within the first 15 minutes, so make sure the kids are near the screen!

Enjoy this beautiful day the Lord has made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it.

Chair Janet Holler, Janet Chambers Krueger, Carley Kregness, Abby Murray, Danielle Wishard-Tudor and Karla Wennerstrom

