



Indiana-Kentucky Synod
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
God's work. Our hands.

911 E. 86th Street, Suite 200, Indianapolis, IN 46240 + 317-253-3522 + www.iksynod.org

Pastoral Message to the People and Communities of the Indiana-Kentucky Synod, ELCA
Bishop Bill Gafkjen + November 2021

Dear People of God,

The public libraries in the community where Janet and I live have declared the months of November and December to be a “Season of Gratitude.” Throughout the two months the libraries are offering programs to assist folks in exploring gratitude: making personalized thankful trees, creating gratitude grams, meditating on gratitude, and more.

Noting that the libraries call this a season of gratitude and not a season of Thanksgiving got me wondering about the difference between thankfulness and gratitude. An article published online by Psychiatric Medical Care in Brentwood Tennessee points out that:

The Oxford Dictionary defines the word thankful as “pleased and relieved.” Both of those are great feelings. Everyone wants to be pleased and relieved. But that’s just it; they’re just feelings, and feelings fade. The Oxford Dictionary defines the word grateful as “showing an appreciation of kindness.” This is where the difference lies; being thankful is a feeling, and being grateful is an action.ⁱ

As we move into and through another Thanksgiving and toward Christmas in the coronavirus wilderness, most of our holiday observances will be different from last year’s but in many cases still not what we would like them to be. We are still uncertain about how long this virus will continue to shape our lives. We are still arguing over vaccinations and limits on our personal freedoms. Few of us have a clear vision of what church, family life, and work will look like in the future.

As important as thankfulness is this season, I wonder: might gratitude be an important and sustaining spiritual discipline to guide us into the future? Melody Beattie, a helpful author on the topics of addiction and codependency, suggests that might be the case.

Gratitude unlocks the fullness of life. It turns what we have into enough, and more. It turns denial into acceptance, chaos to order, confusion to clarity. It can turn a meal into a feast, a house into a home, a stranger into a friend. Gratitude makes sense of our past, brings peace for today, and creates a vision for tomorrow.

Gratitude can help us make sense of our past – including the last couple of years, bring some peace into troubled days, and help us to see God’s promised future that is emerging from our tragic trek through the wilderness.

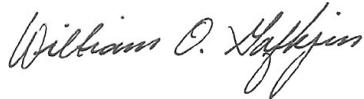
This Thanksgiving-tide could be a good time to move from thankfulness to gratitude in a disciplined daily way, as individuals, as families, and as communities of faith. Perhaps it’s a good time to establish practices like beginning or ending meetings, gatherings, and worship with expressions and actions of

gratitude. How about starting a daily gratitude journal or engaging in gratitude sharing conversations with family or friends at the end of each day, or pausing for brief prayers of gratitude throughout each day?

In the power of the Holy Spirit, the daily discipline of gratitude – rather than greed, or griping or grabbing – can help us to see and trust in the provision and promise of the God who carries us from the cross to the empty tomb with Jesus.

And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God.
(Colossians 3:15-16)

Peace be with you,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "William O. Gafkjen".

The Rev. Dr. William O. Gafkjen, Bishop

ⁱ <https://www.psychmc.com/articles/difference-between-gratitude-and-thankfulness> The Melody Beattie quote is also found here. The quote is originally from her book: **The Language of Letting Go: Hazelden Meditation Series** © 2009.