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Life

Tuesday, November 25, 2008

Giving thanks

In difficult economic times, intangibles like love, support and advice matter most

BY GARY SOULSMAN • THE NEWS JOURNAL • NOVEMBER 23, 2008

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My sister knows it's a tough time for newspapers and that people like me are being laid off. So Marcia asks, when we gather for [holidays](#), how I'm handling the insecurity of not knowing whose work space will be boxed up next.



Last month she told me, if everything falls apart and I need a place to live, I'm welcome to move into her Bel Air, Md., home.

"We have to look out for each other," said my sister, a nurse practitioner who feels her job is recession-proof.

Her generosity is sincere, though she still complains about how I used to hang her upside down by her ankles when we were growing up. (That's what she gets for kicking me in the shins when I annoyed her.) Still, this [Thanksgiving](#) when we gather around the turkey that she's making with her friends, I hope that I find the words to express how lucky I am have an open-hearted sister.

In the face of the greatest challenge to the American economy in my lifetime, I feel more connected to family, not less. My sister's compassion has lessened my anxiety because I feel seen -- and cared for. If I can't work

until I want to retire, there is another choice an hour south, however temporary.

It's almost as if I've stepped into the warmth of a Norman Rockwell scene -- with at least one member of my family beaming as the turkey comes to the table. At my most idealistic, I imagine us all going around the table on Thursday to say what we admire in each other. I'll have no problem.

Pastor Andy Jacob of Hanover Presbyterian Church says that like the first Pilgrims, Americans this year had a difficult year and we're steeling ourselves for hard times ahead. So we're doing an inner dance between gratitude and worry. Could the worst be yet to come even with billions spent by the government to forestall another Great Depression?

"All we know is that what we're experiencing will impact everyone," Jacob says.

This is a moment for crossing cultural barriers to show unity and to show that core values are more important than the rise and fall of the Dow, he says. It's why he's happy that Muslim, Christian and Jewish congregations are worshipping together at an interfaith Thanksgiving service 7:30 p.m. Tuesday at

INTERACTIVE WEATHER

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News Journal file

Last year The Winner Auto Group and Wilmington Jaycees teamed up to provide meals for the needy. This year the United Way and the Delaware Food Bank are jointly raising funds and collect food. The Food Bank provides barrels and will collect them when they are filled with donations.

TO LEARN MORE

- Janet Yabroff teaches spiritual principles wedded to financial management at Skyline United Methodist Church. To learn about her next course, set for February, e-mail her at jmyrmy@verizon.net or call 478-3548.
- Rev. Paul Lundmark, pastor of Grace Lutheran Church in Hockessin, is putting together 13 congregations that would host homeless families on a rotating basis. To learn about the Interfaith Hospitality Network call 239-6481.
- To assist the food party at Hanover Presbyterian Church on Baynard Boulevard in Wilmington call 658-5114.

DEL. DOES MORE

The United Way and Delaware Food Bank -- two agencies that have never worked together before -- joined forces this month to raise additional food and funds for the needy. With job losses and cutbacks, all the First State agencies who help with soup kitchens, food closets, homeless shelter and more are seeing huge increases in requests for help. It's easy to start a food drive in your business, church or school. Form a team, name a leader and make a plan. Contact Charlotte McGarry at the Food Bank of Delaware at 292-1305, ext. 235, or e-mail her at cmcgarry@fbd.org. She will make arrangements to

Congregation Beth Shalom.

For Jacob, crossing faith boundaries is symbolic of what he hopes will be on people's minds -- reaching beyond comfort zones to help people in need.

And there are many of these efforts underway.

At Skyline United Methodist Church, Janet M. Yabroff teaches classes in financial management, which focus on Biblical ideas of stewardship, such as living within a budget and keeping track of expenses. Interest has exploded lately.

"I love coaching people in this and seeing their worries about money fall away," says Yabroff, a deacon who will teach the classes during Lent.

At Grace Lutheran Church in Hockessin, the Rev. Paul Lundmark is putting together a network of 13 faith communities to house homeless families in congregations on a rotating basis.

This chapter of the Interfaith Hospitality Network will be distinct from some local shelters, where the men, women and children in a family often have to live apart.

"I'm trying to get more people aware of this opportunity for service," says Lundmark.

And this Thanksgiving, Jasmine Patterson, 25, is literally back on her feet with a turkey for her four children, thanks to the Lutheran Community Services. She fell and broke bones in her foot, and the LCS helped pay her bills and have enough to eat.

"I recommend them to everyone," Patterson says.

But grief is also joining Delawareans at the Thanksgiving table. It's grief for jobs lost, houses foreclosed on and retirement accounts ravaged by a stock market that continues to sink.

"The media teaches us how to buy and consume," says Debbie Mandel of Long Island, author of "Addicted to [Stress](#)" (Wiley 2008).

"But no one teaches how to lose and we're going through that -- the loss of co-workers, houses and jobs. So we have a hard time being hopeful and believing that things will change."

For her, Thanksgiving is a welcome opportunity to refocus, even for a day. The [holiday](#) calls us to remember what we cherish and value in life.

"Thanksgiving is a little break that allows us to strip away the worry and start at a base line of happiness that says: I woke up this morning and I'm above ground. It must be a good day."

In a similar vein, Lauren Zander, a corporate consultant and life coach in New York City, says this is a time to turn toward others, not away.

"Your sister reached out and made a difference just by having an empathetic conversation with you," says Zander. "I think people underestimate how important they are in the lives of family and friends."

There is a [gift](#) in listening and thinking about people too embarrassed to ask for help. Those folks may need our attention now, Zander says.

At this moment, when people are afraid to spend, there is a gift in not being terrified to walk up to a check-out counter.

"If your finances are in good shape, the smartest thing is to be generous in your spending," Zander says. "Buy something and hundreds of people benefit from one simple purchase. Hoard your money -- and how does that help?"

There is also a good feeling that comes from volunteering. This fall at the Wilmington Montessori School, 55 students have been learning that lesson, as they've embarked on an [adventure](#) in service at Hanover church.

The [students](#), who split into two groups, take turns in the church day care, clothes closet and food pantry. Practically, this means that a couple of times a month students board the No. 11 bus at 9:10 a.m. on Harvey Road and ride south into the Old Ninth Ward.

The students, who are fourth-, fifth- and sixth-graders, fill orders in the food pantry's hospitality center. Or they hang up clothes or read and play games with children in day care.

And, after students wrote an article about the need for food in Delaware, they enlisted the 400-student population in the effort to keep pantry shelves stocked.

"This is a way to make a tangible contribution and the kids are excited," says Lisa Lalama, a teacher with

have collection barrels dropped off at your site. When the food drive is finished -- or barrels are full -- contact the Food Bank of Delaware to arrange pickup.

If you'd prefer to help raise, call Monique Chadband at the United Way of Delaware at 573-3762 or e-mail her at mchadband@uwde.org for information about forming a fundraising team.



News Journal file

Holiday meals for the needy have become a staple of the season.

WHAT THEY NEED

The Food Bank of Delaware and United Way came up with a list of nonperishable items that can be used during the holidays and during this holiday season:

- Macaroni and cheese
- Sweet potatoes/yams
- Cranberry sauce
- Seasoned stuffing mix
- Green beans
- Pasta
- Turkey gravy
- Instant mashed potatoes
- Soup
- Pancake mix
- Canned pineapple
- Pancake syrup
- Apple juice (46-ounce)
- Corn
- Canned hams
- Pet food



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Thanksgiving traditionally meant a huge meal shared with family and friends. But these days it is much more than just sitting around and eating.

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IDEAS FOR AN INSPIRATIONAL HOLIDAY SEASON

- Go around the table and share something you are thankful for in your life.

the 9- to 12-year-olds.

Their interest is a boon to Becky Arnold, coordinator of Hanover's food pantry. She says 124 families asked for food in October, double those who sought help in January. And there were times this October when the pantry ran so low on items it almost had to close.

Generous donations from Westminster Presbyterian Church and Congregation Beth Shalom helped prevent that. Now, students at Wilmington Montessori are working to make sure it doesn't happen.

"They are learning about the world and that meaningful work is uplifting," Lalama says. "I firmly believe that if you help people you feel better about yourself because you've contributed something.

"We know it as adults -- and it's lovely to see it reflected in the children."

And, she says, isn't this part of what Thanksgiving is about?

In your voice

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•Say something you like about each person and thank them for their presence in your life.

•"And remember that sometimes intangible things like love, advice, support, companionship are things you can rely on most," says New York psychologist Paulette Kouffman Sherman, a former Delawarean who offers advice on www.mydatingschool.com.

•Get back to basics and simplify while focusing on what you do have, rather than what you don't.

•Give your time and experience. This can feel much more rewarding spiritually than an expensive gift not in your budget, says Debbie Mandel, the force behind www.turnyourinnerlight.com and author of "Addicted to Stress" (Wiley, 2008).

•"Ask your kids to be involved this year. Have them help set priorities for how the family will spend its resources of time, talent and cash this holiday season. Make sure they know, that even during these wild financial times, you and your family will be together no matter what the budget looks like," says Susan Beacham, founder and CEO of Money Savvy Generation (www.msgen.com), a company to help parents and educators pass on financial principles.

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