

Give thanks; it's not a social obligation

Thanksgiving is not just a day, more significantly, it is a state of mind. This may sound both obvious and redundant, but there is no Thanksgiving without thanksgiving. Too many people try to celebrate Thanksgiving without thanksgiving in their hearts and it ends up a dismal failure.

I have a feeling that many people celebrate Thanksgiving out of a sense of obligation; kind of like everybody else is doing it, so they think they should too. Thanksgiving then becomes one of those social obligations where you eat too much with too many people whom you may not even want to be with. I think you can see that there is really not much in the way of thanksgiving about that.

True thanksgiving is not as much an obligation as it is a joy. Real thanksgiving is an outpouring of gratitude that comes rushing out of you because your heart is filled with so much jubilation that you can't contain it.

We don't see much in the way of real thanksgiving on Thanksgiving nowadays. Instead we see a great deal of striving to impress others, and a great deal of depression because of that striving. We see people who have full houses that are filled with all sorts of stuff and stuffing, who still feel empty and unsatisfied. This is just another reminder that thanksgiving is, first and foremost, a state of mind. When we have not put ourselves in the right frame of mind, the greatest amount of goodies will not make us grateful. In fact, the more stuff we are, the more ungrateful we are likely to be.

Where less is more

I would guess that people who have less tend to be more grateful than those who have more. This is true in every area of life. Those with less freedom, for

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REV. ALLAN EICKELMANN

instance, are more likely to be grateful for the freedom that they have. I am sure that this is one of the reasons that the churches in Eastern Europe tend to be packed these days. After experiencing such extreme restriction on the freedom of religion, the people of Eastern Europe are much more appreciative of the freedom to worship than those of us who simply take our freedoms for granted. It is much more difficult for us to be grateful for our basic freedoms because we have been freedom saturated, so to speak.

Perhaps a required part of every school curriculum should involve spending a year in an impoverished part of the world, where personal freedoms are severely restricted. Such an experience might teach us all the meaning of true thanksgiving.

In lieu of such an experience, we are simply going to have to pray our way into a spirit of thanksgiving, because that is the only way to truly thanksgiving. Prayer is the window to thanksgiving, and it is the only way I know to make this Thanksgiving truly filled with thanksgiving and not just burdensome drudgery. So here's to a thankful Thanksgiving, one that is filled with profound appreciation, deep gratitude and exuberant joy.

The Rev. Allan Eickelmann is the senior minister of the Congregational Church of Birmingham.

A simple coat drive goes beyond boundaries

Two years ago, Temple Beth El teamed with Ranya Kelly, the Shoe Lady of Denver, to deliver coats, shoes, baby equipment, food and household items to over 10,000 individuals served by 45 agencies, shelters and soup kitchens in the tri-county area. They repeated their efforts in 1997. Kelly again brought a truckload of merchandise from Denver; the congregants collected items locally; and in two days in December, they reached out once more to those in need in the community.

This year's Coat Drive promises to be an even greater outreach. Temple Beth El will be joined by co-sponsors Metro

Parent Magazine, Christ Church Cranbrook, The Church of Today, Congregational Church of Birmingham, First Baptist Church of Birmingham, St. Owen Catholic Church, St. Regis Catholic Church and St. Hugo of the Hills to provide coats and more to thousands in Wayne, Oakland and Macomb counties and beyond.

Honorary chairs of this year's effort are Rabbi Daniel Syne of Temple Beth El, Alyssa Martina, publisher of Metro Parent Magazine and community leader Frank Stella. They will again be joined by Ranya Kelly who earned the title 'the

Shoe Lady of Denver' more than a dozen years ago when she turned the simple act of searching for a shoe box to package a Christmas gift into a charitable effort that reaches thousands in Denver, the United States and throughout the world.

Those wishing to contribute to the 1998 Coat Drive may bring gently-used men's, women's and children's coats, new hats and mittens as well as new car seats and high chairs to Temple Beth El now through Dec. 11. For more information on the drive or donations, please call Lois Geremich or Bobbi Charnas, (248) 865-0616.

COMMUNITY MESSENGER

Community Messenger features announcements from Oakland County religious institutions. Write: Community Messenger, c/o Beliefs and Values Editor, Observer & Eccentric Newspaper, 805 E. Maple, Birmingham.

THANKSGIVING DAY SERVICE

A Thanksgiving Day church service will be 10:30 a.m. Thursday, Nov. 26, at First Church of Christ, Scientist, 191 North Chester Street, Birmingham, and First Church of Christ, Scientist, Maple and Inkster in Bloomfield Township. Visitors are welcome.

ELIU V' ELIU

Eliu V' Eliu, the cooperative adult Jewish learning project of the Detroit Conservative movement, is offering the following educational programs, which consist of classes that are self-contained and can be attended independently.

■ A Latte & Learning series entitled "Six Great Ideas that saved the Jewish People" is being offered at 10 a.m. Mondays by Eliu V' Eliu at Borders Books & Music, 30095 Orchard Lake Road, Farmington Hills. The Nov. 30 session, the third in the series, is entitled "The Talmud and the Third Temple." The topic

on Dec. 7 will be "The Invention of the Jewish Home."

The sessions are led by Rabbi Aaron Bergman. New students are welcome. Tuition is \$7 per session (\$5 per session for members of organizations that sponsor Eliu V' Eliu. Adat Shalom, Beth Shalom, B'nai Moshe, Hillel Day School, Sharey Zedek and Women's League for Conservative Judaism—Michigan Branch.)

■ Beit Midrash, an interactive text study series for adult learners co-sponsored by Eliu V' Eliu and the Linud Program of Congregation Sharey Zedek, is holding free-drop-in sessions on Wednesday nights through Dec. 16. "Taking the Piece of Honor" will be the subject, 8:30 p.m. Dec. 2, in the Beit Midrash (House of Study) at the Laker Complex of Congregation Sharey Zedek, 2075 Walnut Lake Road, West Bloomfield. It will be led by Rabbi Joseph Krakoff. The Beit Midrash introduces participants to the traditional Jewish study format in which students pair up to read and discuss a specific Bible text and commentaries, followed by a group discussion led by the instructor. For more information, call (248) 737-1931.

ECUMENICAL INSTITUTE

The Northwest Suburban Interfaith Ministerial Association, Bloomfield Community Television and The Ecumenical Institute for Jewish-Christian Studies will be the next taping of "What's Faith Got To Do With It?" at 7:30 p.m. Thursday, Dec. 3, at Christ Church Cranbrook, at the corner of Lone Pine and Cranbrook Roads in Bloomfield Hills. Clergy address faith issues from the viewpoints of their own religious traditions in the monthly show, moderated by Dr. Allan Eickelmann of the Congregational Church of Birmingham. "Making the Holidays Meaningful" will be the topic; Rabbi Sheila B. Goloboy, Temple Beth El, Sister Carolyn Nelson, St. Owen Church and the Rev. Edward L. Mullins, Christ Church Cranbrook, will discuss the topic and answer audience questions following the one-half hour program. For information, call Rabbi Amy Brodsky: (248) 353-2434; or Dr. Allan Eickelmann, (248) 646-4511.

FAITH LUTHERAN CHRISTMAS CONCERT

An evening of ethnic and "American" choral and dance, along with traditional Christmas carols, will be presented at 7 p.m. Friday, Dec. 4, at Faith Lutheran Church, 37635 Dequindre

Road, near 16 Mile Road, Troy. Rina Singh, a classical East Indian dancer, will tell the story of Jesus through dance. Choral groups featured will be the Detroit Urban Lutheran School Children's Choir and Faith Lutheran Church Praise Team. All proceeds will benefit event sponsor, People of the Book Lutheran Outreach. Ticket donation is \$5. A reception will follow. For ticket reservations or more information call (734) 467-6256.

CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH CHRISTMAS CONCERT

The Congregational Church of Birmingham will present a free Christmas Concert at 4 p.m. Sunday, Dec. 6. The concert features vocal and instrumental ensembles as well as soprano soloists. The church is at 1000 Cranbrook Road, at Woodward, in Bloomfield Hills. For more information call (248) 646-4511.

SUNDAY ROSARY

The Sunday Rosary group at St. Anastasia Catholic Church, 4571 John R in Troy, meets at 7 p.m. every Sunday to pray for world peace, the unborn and intentions of all in attendance. It lasts about a half hour. (248) 688-8380.

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