

# Thanksgiving reminds us of the importance of family

Increasingly, my wife Kathy and I enjoy attending our church service on Thanksgiving morning. Not many people show up, so the service is quiet and intimate. The readings and the psalms help us reflect on how much we have to be thankful for. And we sing the old, familiar Thanksgiving hymns.

My grandfather's favorite - "We Gather Together" - moves me especially.

Clarence Harwick had retired to a little house in Petersburg by the time my memories of him begin. He had been a teacher all his life, ending his career heading the vocational program at Detroit's Southwestern High School. He was a deeply devout Methodist, convinced that the history of our times consisted in

Phil Power

the revelation of God's will.

*We gather together to ask the Lord's blessing;  
He chastens and hastens his will to make known.*

Singing my grandfather's hymn on Thanksgiving morning reminds me of the treasure of family and that gift of memory that keeps that treasure shining bright, even on cold, gray November days. But we also sing other hymns, ones that help root us in the swinging wheel of time and the rhythm of the seasons. By this time in November (usually), Kathy and I have cut down the perennials, planted the bulbs, mulched the beds with compost made from last year's leaves. Reflecting on these rituals of fall are as much a part of our lives as our delight in the first buds of spring.

*We plow the fields, and scatter the good seed on the land,  
But it is fed and watered by God's almighty hand;  
He sends the snow in winter, the warmth to swell the grain,  
The breezes and the sunshine, and soft refreshing rain.*

*All good things around us are sent from heaven above;  
Then thank the Lord, O thank the Lord for all his love.*

But Thanksgiving is not just a time for reflecting on the pilgrims and our rural past. It's become preeminently a time for families and friends to come together. Thanksgiving week is the busiest travel season of the year, and even with all our recent uncertainty about the safety of air travel, airports will surely be jammed with friends and families coming home.

In our case, we'll have eight at the table for Thanksgiving dinner. Both my parents and Kathy's father have passed away, and her mother is too frail to travel from her home in Madison, Wis. So dinner will include some of our oldest friends, a couple, and her brother and sister-in-law from Arizona. And our two sons will be home, one from his medical residency in Denver and the other from his job as a server at a local restaurant.

When all is said and done, it is friends and family that really matter in our lives, that link us to the hopes and fears, successes and failures of humanity and give us hope that our existence extends beyond the limits of our own individuality.

So far as I know, Thanksgiving is a uniquely American holiday, perhaps because we all have so, so much to be thankful for. We are so fortunate to live in, truly, a New World, rich beyond all measure and separated by oceans from the age-old quarrels of the Old World. Perhaps that is why the terrorist acts of Sept. 11 have come as such a shock to our national psyche: For the first time in our memories, the hatreds of others have been visited on us in our own homeland.

And so as we sit in church on Thanksgiving morning, it's comforting to think in terms of agricultural metaphor. The harvest of the summer is in; the jams and jellies from our peaches, raspberries and apples sit in shining glass jars in the pantry. Our fall work has tidied up our land and garden for the winter. And the harvest of our friends and family will be - joyously, thankfully - at our table for dinner together.

*Come, ye thankful people, come; raise the song of harvest home.*

*All is safely gathered in, ere the winter storms begin.*

*God, our Maker, doth provide for our wants to be supplied;*

*Come to God's own temple, come; raise the song of harvest home.*

Phil Power is chairman of HomeTown Communications Network Inc., the company that owns this newspaper. He welcomes your comments, either by voice mail at (734) 953-2047, Ext. 1880, or by e-mail at [ppower@homecomm.net](mailto:ppower@homecomm.net)

## LETTERS

### Intolerance

I am writing in response to two letters printed in the Observer. One was written by Carol Lucas which appeared in the Nov. 8 issue, and the other was a response to her letter included in the Nov. 15 issue.

One of our basic freedoms as American is to be able to hold and voice an opinion, such as the one Ms. Lucas shared.

Since when is merely holding to a religious belief equated with being intolerant? Ms. Lucas made every effort to show that she is not only loyal to her religious beliefs, but that she is all inclusive in her acceptance of her Muslim neighbors.

On the other hand, Ms. Kiraly's letter was not only intolerant of Ms. Lucas' letter, but very judgmental for a person who professes to espouse Jesus' very own words of "Judge not lest you be judged."

I, like Ms. Lucas, believe that Muslims and Christians do not worship the same God. A basic and historical tenant of the Christian faith is that Jesus Christ is God, something openly and unashamedly denounced by Muslims (though they believe Jesus was a prophet). It does not make me intolerant of Muslims to believe this, as I would hope that it does not make Muslims intolerant of me because they believe that Jesus is not God.

Come on. This is America. We don't all have to believe the same thing to be considered tolerant, and we certainly shouldn't be labeled intolerant just because we have differing religious beliefs. Isn't that why our Nation was formed in the first place?

Let's not reduce our freedom to mere uniformity. If we do, we have not only lost the freedom of the individual, but freedom of religion.

Carol Rebandt  
Farmington Hills

### Metro fixes

I read with interest your Nov. 1 editorial, "County commission must fix airport business practices," about the investigation of Metro Airport's contracting practices. You raised several good points, and I agree with your assessment that the state investigation seems based upon party politics rather than trying to improve airport services for patrons. Clearly, the only people that would benefit by a big government takeover of the airport would be the politicians in Lansing.

The article concluded by encouraging the Wayne County Commission to counter the state investigation with a thorough investigation of its own, and to put in place new standards for letting contracts.

Let it be known that the Wayne County Commission has already taken these steps and that the state investigation is merely an aftereffect of our efforts, not the other way around.

As a result of a Wayne County Commission audit of the old parking contract at the airport, several problems were found. The commission took action immediately by firing the parking contractor, filing a lawsuit against them for possible overcharges and bringing in a new company to run the parking at the airport.

We have also conducted other audits which have raised questions about additional airport contracts.

Please note that the state committee has not conducted a single audit of the airport. What the state committee's auditors have been doing for the past two years is performing "reviews."

These reviews are far less detailed - and less reliable - than the full audits that the Wayne County Commission has performed through its Auditor General.

Therefore, the public should know that the questionable business practices discovered at the airport have been a direct result of the work of the Wayne County Commission.

Since I took office less than three years ago, the commission has made a number of changes to improve its oversight of the airport and the way that contracts are let.

In addition to the past audits that have been conducted, we have now permanently placed two full-time auditors at the airport to continually audit and review business practices there. The Commission has also created a separate standing committee - the Committee on Airport Operations - that is solely responsible for overseeing airport contracts.

And we have also adopted a new historic Comprehensive Procurement Ordinance which provides strict rules that all county departments, including the airport, must follow when letting a contract, including competitive, open and fair bidding practices and better oversight of change orders.

Although the commission may have delegated away much of its authority in the past, that is no longer the case. It has been progressively insistent that it has more control of county operations, and through its efforts, questionable practices have been, and are being, discovered and corrected countywide.

Let there be no mistake: The Wayne County Commission is firmly committed to improving operations at Detroit Metropolitan Wayne County Airport and is steadily moving in that direction.

John J. Sullivan  
Wayne County Commissioner

*shop*  
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*for the holidays*



HOLIDAY 2001 EVENTS BIRMINGHAM COMMUNITY TREE LIGHTING: Wednesday, November 21, 6 p.m., Shain Park.  
SANTA HOUSE OPENS: Wednesday, November 21, 7 p.m., Shain Park. HOLIDAY VISIONS: Friday, December 7, 4-10 p.m., Stores  
Throughout Downtown. For more info call downtown Birmingham at 248-133-1300, or visit our website at [www.birmingham.com](http://www.birmingham.com)