The upcoming Thanksgiving holiday is marked by our thanks for the many blessings we have received over the last year. It’s often celebrated with a huge spread of food, followed by the traditional ritual of loosening one’s belt, calling dibs on the recliner and the sharing of family news over boisterous conversation.

What’s the Thanksgiving ritual at your house? Is it ham, chicken, turkey or a “turducken” (that’s a chicken, inside a duck, inside a turkey)? Which pie is it: pumpkin, apple, blueberry or (my favorite) pecan? Or maybe it’s all of the above?

Do you go around the table and name something you are thankful for? My mother had us do that as kids. And when my two younger brothers and I would give goofy answers one after the other, like “I’m thankful for potatoes,” “I’m thankful for gravy” and “I’m thankful for the pecan pie,” my mom would say: “Nice try boys. Let’s begin again.” She was persistent in her desire for us to be truly thankful — and not just on one day of the year, but every day of our lives.

To be sure, it’s nice to have a national holiday that helps us focus on being thankful at least one day a year. However, the apostle Paul has the boldness to tell the Philippians to rejoice at all times.

**Rejoice always ... huh?**

What’s your gut reaction when you read Paul’s imperative to rejoice “always”? My reaction is that being thankful is not always easy. Sometimes, life circumstances can make us feel more like Eeyore than Christopher Robin. Paul’s words challenge us. Whether we receive nothing, have nothing or come from nothing, Paul says we are to rejoice. The plain truth is that’s often easier said than done.

It is a curious thing to be able to rejoice in the Lord always. Perhaps you know someone who is always choosing to be thankful. Not because they feel they have to, but because they truly are grateful. I’ve always often found it inspiring and encouraging to be around such people, particularly because they’re also being intentional and sincere about thanking me for something. Saying “thank you” goes a long way.

So it is true that Thanksgiving reminds us to give thanks, but should it really take a national holiday for us to be thankful? In fact, should our rejoicing and thankfulness only be limited to the giant spread of Thanksgiving food, our loosened belts, cushy recliners and our labor-saving dishwashers?

Paul invites us to know what...
it is to rejoice in the Lord “always.” He writes the following verses just a few sentences after his command to rejoice always:

“...nothing.” Yet perhaps that sarcastic phrase might actually be right if we think about the big picture of salvation.

Jesus did give Paul nothing.

That is, Jesus Christ gave Paul (and all believers) “nothing” if we think of it like this: When God the Father looks at the long list of sins against us — all our complaining, all the things we take for granted, all our selfishness, all our jealousy, our fighting, our lack of compassion and our ungracious attitudes — He sees “nothing” against us.

On the cross at Calvary, Jesus Christ took the punishment we deserved. He took into Himself all of our sin and guilt. He took upon Himself all of our shame and sorrow and He took upon Himself the wrath of God, taking it all far away from us and burying it in His tomb of death. He endured it all so that we would receive “nothing” as payment for our sins. For this we can indeed say, “Thanks for nothing!”

But that’s just the first half of the story. Be assured that God does not simply leave us with ‘nothing.’ Rather, God covers us with the everlasting righteousness, innocence and blessedness of His own Son Jesus Christ."

"Be assured that God does not simply leave us with ‘nothing.’ Rather, God covers us with the everlasting righteousness, innocence and blessedness of His own Son Jesus Christ."

Nothing ... and everything

In receiving “nothing” as punishment for our sins, we were given “everything” in Christ Jesus!

As the Apostles’ Creed summarizes, we are given the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting. Even more, we are given new life, right here and right now. We are a new creation. The old has gone; the new has come. He gives us a robust and confident hope to greet the burdens of each day, for His mercies are new each day!

What is more, we have a true Thanksgiving meal to partake of each week in the Lord’s Supper. In fact, it is often called the Eucharist, a title taken from the words of institution, where it is the Greek word for “giving thanks.” (“On the night when he was betrayed, he took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them and said, “Take eat, this is my body given for you.”)"

Yes, the Lord richly and daily provides us with all that we need for this body and life, for which, as the Small Catechism reminds us, it is our “duty to thank and praise, serve and obey Him” (from the explanation of the First Article of the Apostles’ Creed).

So join me in thanking Jesus for “nothing” and “everything” all at once and at all times. I can think of no better way of doing so than by simply using the Words of Scripture:

“Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice.”
Let God be God!

Following is a letter from Anne Bilski, director of Messiah Lutheran Preschool, Mounds View. Messiah was a recipient of a To All Generations grant. We praise God for the faithful supporters of this grant to help our schools and congregations reach every generation for Christ.

In January 2019, when I heard about the closing of a local LCMS preschool, my heart broke for the families and staff. In a matter of months, God answered the prayer of question for me, Pastor Rich (Steenstra Jr.), and the leadership of Messiah. We knew that without a doubt, God was orchestrating something much larger than we could ever imagine.

With our school year closing at the end of May, and our new school year beginning in September, we knew without a doubt that it would be a small miracle to complete what needed to be completed.

It is with overwhelming thankfulness, joy and excitement that, as of Sept. 6, I am officially able to say that we will welcome 42 new families, along with welcoming back 14 families, into our classrooms. Thirty of our students are coming to us with no church home and have not been baptized.

We know that God will be God. He has the ultimate plan, and I cannot thank Him enough for allowing me the opportunity to be a part of this.

The expansion of Messiah Preschool would not be possible without the extremely generous donations from fellow congregations that believe in the To All Generations movement and grant.

I cannot thank you enough for your belief in Messiah Preschool, your prayers and the emotional and financial support that you have provided to us. We look forward to the years ahead and what God has in store for us.

As we have said the past nine months ... “Let God be God!”

In His service,
Annie Bilski

For the period ending Sept 30, 2019

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Mission receipts—2019 vs. 2018

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2019 congregational receipts budgeted at $2,100,000

MINNESOTA SOUTH DISTRICT LCEF

August 2019

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Year-to-date July 1, 2019–Aug. 31, 2019

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‘Pressing into the fields all around us’

The Lord is bringing the ends of the earth to us.

Recent years have seen an influx of immigrants and refugees to Minnesota from Somalia, Mexico, India, Ethiopia and many more countries. Yet the cultural, religious, social and language barriers can make reaching out to our immigrant and refugee neighbors intimidating.

That’s where People of the Book Lutheran Outreach (POBLO) comes in.

POBLO has a mission “to meet the physical, social, and spiritual needs of Muslims and other immigrants and refugees in the United States by sharing the love of Jesus in practical and culturally relevant ways.”

Here in the Minnesota South District, we have four POBLO missionaries: Nader and Georgette Alaraj in Bloomington, Burnsville and Prior Lake, and John and Maryam Gayed in Rochester. These four missionaries come alongside volunteers to spread the love of Christ through human care outreach. Each city has an International Friendship Center where classes — everything from English to sewing — and personal relationships abound.

In Rochester, POBLO volunteer Betty Lindberg works with students learning English through a Bible reading class. She’s found that an informal approach to the class gives the students space to ask questions, build their conversational English skills and create friendships. Many of the students in her class are in Rochester for research work at Mayo Clinic. They’re often very intelligent and curious about Christianity and how we live.

“One of the short-term students who had been introduced to Christ and the Bible at a university in China declared that she loves Jesus!” Betty says, regarding a recent class. “She had tried to read the Bible when it was given to her those years before but said it was difficult, and she gave up.

“She is excited to learn, asks good questions and is so thankful and happy for this opportunity. Trust has been built up, and she is not afraid to ask about things. What a joy and privilege we have to plant or water what the Lord is doing!”

One thing that impresses many of Betty’s students is the generosity of the POBLO community. The students may come to learn English, but they receive so much more.

“Last week, when I arrived and opened up, there was a box of coffee K-Cups sitting at the door, an anonymous donation,” Betty says. “In class that day, one of the students asked how we can be so kind and giving (food, picnics, Bibles, movie nights, water, coffee) without asking for money. That day, the Lord gave me the perfect picture to share our support with that box of coffee! I explained also that many churches support us — many people who have not been to the building, perhaps, but have the love of Christ prompting them, and they may give through their church. The students were awed.”

Betty finds great joy and excitement in sharing the truth and love of Christ through her Bible reading class. She offers this encouragement to all of us as we reach out to our neighbors: “Press on in the Lord’s work with His leading, into the fields all around us, ripe unto harvest! All praise and glory to Him! Amen.”

You, too, can serve the Lord through POBLO by:

PRAYING. Lift up the missionaries, volunteers, and friends of POBLO in prayer daily.

VOLUNTEERING. Teach ESL, citizenship, sewing and knitting, cooking and other classes at one of the four International Friendship Centers in the district. No prior experience is necessary.

DONATING. Gifts of food, proper clothing, Thrivent Choice Dollars and gift cards are always welcome.

Please ask to be added to the IFC group on Facebook: International Friendship Centers Twin Cities. Contact Nader (Twin Cities metro) at 402-968-6486 or nader@poblo.org. Or contact John (Rochester) at john@poblo.org.
Rev. Ryan Eden was installed as pastor of Redeemer Lutheran Church, Winona, on Sept. 15. We praise and thank God for the good works He has in store for Pastor Eden and the congregation at Redeemer. From left, Revs. William Meilner, Richard Moor, Ryan Eden, Frederick Morck and William Flesch.

King of Glory Lutheran Church, Blaine, celebrated its 50th anniversary on Aug. 18. King of Glory was started in August 1969 with 84 members. The members were blessed to have former pastors celebrate with them. Rev. Dr. Lucas Woodford, Minnesota South District president, preached during the service. From left, Revs. David Hintze, Richard Krogen, Dr. Lucas Woodford, Peter Gueldner and Vernon Dorn. Krogen was the congregation’s first pastor. Gueldner is currently serving King of Glory.

Each year, the Minnesota South District selects a project to support with our prayers and offerings throughout the school year. All contributions to Hearts for Jesus during the 2019-20 school year will help support Helping Hands Eastern European Ministries.

Hearts for Jesus to support European mission

Many of the children who arrive at the orphanage are developmentally delayed from neglect. Each baba works with two to three children for two to three years, reading and singing to them, telling them about Jesus, and hugging and loving them. The children often progress very rapidly after they start working with their baba. It’s a moving testament to the power of physical touch and individual attention to impact the developmental growth of these children of God.

Another ministry of Helping Hands focuses on translating and distributing Lutheran devotional and Bible study materials to orphanages, high schools, home care programs and nursing homes in Bulgaria. Last year, they were able to dub two Lutheran Hour Ministries (LHM) animated children’s movies into Bulgarian. This year, they’re hoping to dub several more LHM videos and a series of 15-minute pro-life videos (Bulgaria has one of the highest abortion rates in all of Europe).

Helping Hands founder Linda Phillips “can’t stop smiling and thanking God” for “this opportunity to get the word out to more Bulgarians.” We hope our district schools will join us in supporting this wonderful ministry!

Find resources and more information at mnsdistrict.org/hearts-for-Jesus.
Hundreds of people filled the parking lot at Golden Valley Lutheran Church (GVLC), Golden Valley, on Sept. 22. It was a day of free food, worship, carnival games, vendors and music as GVLC hosted its annual Community Block Party.

Now in its eighth year, the block party welcomed more than 550 local residents and the greater community. The block party is the church’s biggest outreach event, rooted in our mission: “Offering Hope to the World by Connecting People to Christ and to Each Other.”

“We’re blessed to be neighbors to our community through the annual block party,” said Rev. Kurt Weber, GVLC pastor. “Hundreds of volunteers from the church and community gathered to serve and enjoy each other in great food, fellowship and fun. We thank God for the opportunity to build relationships and share the love of Christ.”

A special emphasis on service was placed on this year’s event. GVLC partnered with Harvest Pack, a local nonprofit organization offering hunger relief to people in need. More than 75 volunteers assembled more than 15,300 meal packs to go to local Minneapolis food shelves. And they had fun doing it!

Numerous positive comments were made by visitors of the block party, including:

▶ “It was super fun! My grandbabies loved it! Thank you!”
▶ “It was a great event! So glad to be part of packing meals to be distributed for local needs!”
▶ “Thank you for welcoming me; I will definitely be coming back.”
▶ “Such fun! And the game volunteers were especially awesome!”

For more information on Golden Valley Lutheran Church and the Community Block Party, contact Jennifer Hall, GVLC Director of Family Ministries, at jenh@gvlc.net or Carol Paschke, Communications Deacon, at cipaschke@yahoo.com.

GVLC is located at 5501 Glenwood Ave in Golden Valley, just west of Minneapolis, and can be reached at gvlc.net or 763-544-2810.

— Submitted by Carol Paschke
As the season is changing and leaves begin to fall, the work of the LWML Minnesota South District Executive Committee (EC) is at its finest! The EC met in September at Camp Omega to work on strategic plans for the future.

The team met on a Friday morning and began with Bible study, led by Rev. Eric Nelson, pastoral counselor. This study set the tone for the work to come. The team examined areas such as communication, human care, Gospel outreach and finances, and discussed the direction they hope these areas will go.

Bob LaCroix, Camp Omega executive director, led the team on a small tour of the camp. Camp Omega is a place of God’s ministry for children’s summer camps, and a place to enrich Christian faith by partnering with the congregations of Minnesota. The team saw the cabins and outpost camps for campers to stay in, as well as the future site of the new Adult and Family Retreat Center. If you have not seen Camp Omega, please do so; it is a beautiful setting!

Both the conversations and the work accomplished were productive and provided direction for the district. We hope the strategic plan will enable people to feel engaged, encouraged and equipped to serve the Lord with gladness through the LWML Minnesota South District.

Our “Mighty Mites” need to put on more muscle if we are to reach our 2018-20 LWML district mission grant goal. Prayerfully consider contributing more to mites as you are able. As a society, you could consider having a special fundraiser designated for the goal. Encourage members of your family and congregation to participate in mite offerings.

The LWML mite box should be visible in any size in the home, office and church as a reminder of the impact those coins have in helping bring souls to Christ.

— Carol Hubert, District VP of Gospel Outreach
A gift to ministry that provides for family first

Faith Evangelical Lutheran Church, Minneapolis, and Concordia University, St. Paul (CSP), recently received a gift from the estate of a faithfully supportive couple who went to be with the Lord in 2007. The gift represented the remainder of a charitable trust the donors had set up during their lifetime.

When establishing their plan in 1991, their concern was that they “didn’t have much.” Their goal was to provide for their disabled son and contribute to their favorite ministries. A gift planning counselor from the LCMS Foundation, working in our district, showed the couple a way to do just that.

They set up a charitable remainder unitrust to be funded after both of them went to heaven. The charitable trust provided income for their son during his lifetime, and when he was called to the Lord, the remainder would be split between CSP and Faith.

After 12 years of support from the estate, their son has joined them in glory. Their gift to their favorite ministries will help support the Lord’s work for many years to come.

If you too have concerns about how you can provide for both family and ministry from your estate, contact Matt Steiner at 952-223-2155 or matthew.steiner@lfnd.org. Matt is a gift planning counselor for the LCMS Foundation, paid for by the Minnesota South District, and he can help you with your estate and gift planning goals.