

Saying ‘thank you’?

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In thanksgiving for all God’s generosity, we might consider drafting a new thank you note

by the Rev. Rosemary C. Mitchell, Mission Engagement & Support | Special to Presbyterian News Service



The Rev. Rosemary C. Mitchell saying “thank you” to Trinity Presbyterian Church in Arlington, Virginia, in 2019 for going “Four for Four,” participating in each of the PC(USA)’s Special Offerings. (Contributed photo)

LOUISVILLE — *“The Earth is the Lord’s and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it; for God has founded it on the seas and established it on the rivers.”* — Psalm 24:1–2

“Were the whole realm of nature mine,

That were a present far too small.

Love so amazing, so divine,

Demands my soul, my life, my all.”

—Isaac Watts, *“When I Survey the Wondrous Cross”* (1707)

Early in my ministry, I started the practice of writing thank you notes to those church members who had fulfilled a leadership position or served in some special way. I’ll never forget the time I received a call from a member who expressed to me how surprised she was to receive a “thank you” from the church. To this day, I wish I had asked her more about why she was surprised.

In the secular fundraising world, writing thank you notes, and personal impact reports are the basic expectation. And as secular practices of fundraising have increasingly invaded

the spiritual world of stewardship, we church fundraisers have been compelled to do the same. Although I understand that saying thanks makes sense in a world where I am directly asking for support of my organization, I find myself questioning whether I should really be thanking someone for the gift they have made as a response to *God's* love and grace.

When the author of Psalm 24 writes, "The Earth is the Lord's and all that is in it..." the Psalmist means to say that God is the owner, and we are the stewards of God's Creation. And to paraphrase the hymnwriter cited above, I can never adequately respond to God's amazing, never-ending love and grace. So perhaps our service, leadership and giving is our human act of saying thank you to God for God's never-ending gift of generous grace and love.

At our baptism, we become a member of the household of God. At our confirmation, we make our own promises to God and to the people of God to serve and to give. At our ordination as a pastor, elder or deacon, we make promises to serve God and the people of God with energy, intelligence, imagination and love. Since all of this is in response to our gratitude to God and the people of God, why do I still think a person needs to be thanked, and, in turn, do I expect to be thanked for my response to God's generosity to me?

Perhaps then, in lieu of my standard thank you note, I could reframe my acknowledgement as a teachable moment, secure in the knowledge that *all* gifts to the Church will be used in gratitude to God in thanksgiving for *all* of God's generosity.

What if my *new* thank you note were to read as follows:

"We affirm and recognize your gift as *your* thank you to our God, from whom all blessings flow. Because your gift joins with the gifts of the people of God called Presbyterians, together we promise that your gift will be used with energy, intelligence, imagination and love. As God's partners in Creation and the hands and feet of Christ, we will repair the breaches in God's Creation and in our relationships with one another. As God's faithful people, may we all live our lives as one never-ending thank you."

Thanks be to God!

To our readers: I am interested in hearing from you! What words would you use? Please feel free to email me at mitchell.rosemary@pcusa.org with your advice and ideas.

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