

Thanksgiving – By Bernita Tuinenga, Executive Director of Volunteers in Service – 11.25.2013

“In that wonderful day you will sing: ‘Thank the LORD! Praise his name! Tell the world what he has done. Oh, how mighty he is!’” Isaiah 12:4 (NLT)

I love fall! Watching a tree turn from lush green to a colorful array of red, yellow, orange and gold; the smell of leaves when rustling through them under foot just makes me smile. Being out in nature is one of my favorite things and I often wonder what it would be like to just one season work with a farmer harvesting the crop. With the season of fall also comes shorter, cooler days; more time spent indoors and a seemingly enhanced time of connecting with each other in our daily routines. The fall holiday, Thanksgiving Day, is one of my favorites. When I think back to childhood I remember what I loved was the more casual feel of church that day, observing around me the many extended family members in church, all of us carrying in bags of food donated for a designated charity and most of all I loved singing the songs of thankfulness that often were only part of that service; “Come ye thankful people come.” I also knew that after church would be the “feast.” I really didn’t like turkey all that much but I loved the excitement of seeing relatives and friends on that day. Some I knew, others I really didn’t but the air was full of loud contagious laughter and a feeling of invitation that was extended to anyone and everyone who walked in the door.

So what is that like today? Are we excited to engage in conversation with each other? Are we sensitive and invitational to those who have no place to go to enjoy “the feast?” In our busy lives are we able to pause long enough to reflect and give thanks to God for His presence in our lives? It’s easy to give thanks when life is “good;” when our year has been full of blessings that we can see and feel, when we are healthy, gainfully employed, able to meet financial obligations and surrounded by loving family and friends. But what about those who don’t experience those same blessings, who struggle to find a job, who are unable to provide for themselves and other loved ones, who struggle with housing, food, transportation; who are isolated, in abusive relationships, in a marriage that is falling apart, parenting a child who is making poor choices; when addictions are part of everyday living and hope is gone. How is it possible to give thanks when everything in life is a struggle? How is it possible to believe that God is still present when he allows distress, pain and suffering?

In the book of Hosea chapter 2:15 God is speaking about Israel when he says “I will return her vineyards to her and transform the Valley of Trouble into a gateway of hope.” Israel disappointed God so many times yet God did not forget them and continued to guide them and restore hope.

This Thanksgiving I am thankful for deacons who are the appointed ministers of mercy in the church that God uses to help “transform the Valley of Trouble into a gateway of hope” to so many who are suffering from physical and emotional struggles; who often lose sight of hope. Deacons are on the front lines of the mission field. Their work is not only about meeting physical needs but also about meeting soul needs. Through divine appointments, God gives deacons the chance to be spiritual role models to someone who may have lost sight of God’s love. Deacons listen, love, show compassion and care deeply about God’s hurting people in the midst of their busy lives at home and at work. What an overwhelming load and responsibility; what an honor to be chosen by God to serve Him as a deacon. God bless you deacons as you serve, love, share in the joys and the frustrations. It is my prayer that as you experience God’s amazing love and transforming power that you will sing “Thank the LORD! Praise his name! Tell the world what he has done. Oh, how mighty HE is!” Isaiah 12:4. For it is in Him and through Him that lives are transformed and renewed and I am thankful for each one of you and your willingness to serve! Have a blessed Thanksgiving deacons!