

By Bill Husfelt

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Happy Thanksgiving!

I hope everyone reading this has a chance to slow down, relax and enjoy time with family and friends next week. And I hope Thanksgiving Week includes some quiet time for reflection about what we're collectively thankful for. I thought I'd jump ahead, though, and share some of the things I'm most thankful for this year:

1. Health: We can all agree, having been through the pandemic together, that we should always be grateful for our own good health and the health of those we love. I know many people experienced losses as a result of the pandemic and that makes the holidays hard. If you know someone who has experienced a loss recently, please make sure you reach out to them to offer support.
2. Family: The holidays are a time to catch up with family members we maybe don't see very often due to logistics and travel etc. and I hope everyone who has been missing family members has that opportunity this year. There will be 13 grandchildren at the Husfelt extended family Thanksgiving and I'm so grateful for each one of them.
3. Community: I attended the Salvation Army's Empty Stocking Fund kick-off last week and I'm so grateful to live in a community that cares so deeply about those less fortunate. Thank you to all of the individuals, churches and agencies who go out of their way during the holidays and throughout the year to ensure as many families as possible experience "holiday cheer."
4. Educators: I'm grateful for EVERYONE who works with and for our children and that includes teachers, support staff members, administrators, volunteers and others. Our school system is blessed to employ the kindest, most compassionate educators and support employees on every level and I'm thankful for all of them. It's been wonderful to be able to welcome volunteers back onto our campuses this year as well and we appreciate all of those who donate their precious time to our schools.
5. Challenges: It sounds strange to be thankful for challenges but each challenge is an opportunity to learn and to grow. While we all faced hardships after Hurricane Michael, we also had an opportunity to witness so much generosity and giving. We also faced challenges as a result of the pandemic but, again, we came together to show that #850Strong isn't just something we say; it's who we are!

I hope you have your own list of things to be thankful for this Thanksgiving and I hope you have an opportunity to share that list with your loved ones. If you have a chance next week, please reach out to someone you know who is struggling because hope can really be a game changer for those facing challenges. We cannot ever underestimate the power of an encouraging smile or comment or the impact of a helpful deed or donation. We all have the power to be game changers for others and I hope you have a chance to "pay it forward" this holiday season.

It's easy to think we're sharing a "thank you" when we like or share a social media post but I think we've forgotten the amazing power of a hand-written thank you card or even a heartfelt email when it comes

to thanking those for whom we're grateful. So, pick up the phone, grab a thank you card, type an email or go out of your way to find a way to say thank you in person this year!

Stay safe and God Bless!