

**The Gratitude Department  
Rev. Tony Lorenzen  
Pathways Church  
Southlake, TX  
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We live in a marketing savvy age. Today if we have trouble with a product or a person or service we go to consumer support or the customer service department or even the help desk. Now you can even get these services online, which is nice because if you get them on the phone, most of the time you are talking to a computer – well, actually you mostly listen to a computer talk at *you*.

I'm just old enough, in my early forties to remember a few stragglng places that had Complaint Desks or Complaint Departments. If you are anything like me, and you probably are because you're probably human, you go about your days and have complaints and issues with things and people and need a place to go for help with issues and service and you need support and help and wish online FAQ's were easier to navigate at times, but are generally happy they are there and you, like me, perhaps sometime even

remember to gush a great deal of thanks and gratitude in the general direction of someone in customer service who spends their time helping you and probably doesn't spend a whole lot of time getting thanked.

If you're anything like me, and you probably are, being human again, you also probably go about your day and take some things personally and let other things roll off your back. As you go about your day, sometimes people complain to or about *you*. And I'll wager there's a goodly amount of time you feel like the person at the customer service desk who gets complaints thrown at them, but not enough thanks or appreciation. Can you relate?

Step up and enter the world of the Gratitude Department. No appointment or phone call necessary. Thanks and graceful appreciation are what we offer here at the Gratitude Department and one of operators is always standing by ready to help you. Perhaps you'd like to step up to the Gratitude Desk and speak with a Thanks and Graceful Appreciation Angel in person?

Come on in, I'll take you behind the scenes of the Gratitude Department. One thing cranky, curmudgeony people don't understand about us is that all of us here in the Gratitude Department once found it very difficult to practice gratitude and that we still have our moments. Ill will is easy, bad manners are rampant, and our culture has conditioned everyone to think it's all about them. That's something you learn in the Gratitude Department, it's sooooooooooooooooooooo not about you. When it's all about you, it's so hard to be thankful for anything except your birthday present. And really, we're all soooooo tired of getting you the perfect tie and grocery store flowers and candy.

Hold on a second, I've got some people here at the window –

Thanks. I know you're feeling underappreciated this week, maybe even not valued. But you are value-able. Just for being you. I know the house wouldn't get clean without you and the office wouldn't get anything done without you. I know how special you are. You are appreciated.

Did you know there is nothing you need to do or be or accomplish to be okay? That just being yourself is alright? Yeah, most people don't hear that enough. Another thing we do at the Gratitude Department is spend time going through some of the people and things we're grateful for because it helps us know what to spot – the things other people are looking for, but can't name.

Would you like to hear about some of mine?

I work at a church – Pathways Church in Southlake, TX. Wonderful congregation, you know them? Ah, you know there's a group of volunteers who cleans the church on a regular basis? They call themselves the Partners in Grime. You may not see them, but you see the results of their efforts: the bathrooms – and the toilets are cleaned, the floors swept, the wastebaskets are emptied. It's messy dirty work. I'm grateful for our members who started this group and for everyone who helps and has helped with it, but I want to tell you about someone who I think is the youngest member of Partners in Grime. One of our newest members Laurie Siporin has

been helping out Partners in Grime since she and her partner Gwendy started attending Pathways early last Spring. Thank you, Laurie. I'm grateful for Laurie and Gwen, but that's not who I want to tell you about. When Laurie comes to work with Partners in Grime, she brings her ten-year-old daughter Kelsie. What really knocked me over was that Kelsie doesn't sit and play or read or do her homework while her mom cleans the church, Kelsie cleans the church, too. Kelsie, I am so grateful for you. Thank you so much for helping to clean the church. I am so happy you are here at Pathways.

A couple of weeks ago, my friend Sharon sent me a leaf. Yup. One leaf. In the mail. A leaf from Massachusetts. It's red. It had fallen off the tree where it had lived and died. She covered it in a glycerin mixture to preserve it and put it in a frame and sent it to me. I am having trouble remembering when I have appreciated a gift so much. I have put this framed leaf on the wall just outside and to the right of my office so I see it as often as possible.

It reminds me of Sharon and her husband and her daughters. It reminds me of the church that ordained me. It reminds me of New England and to be grateful for all of the change of seasons and weather, because I had begun to get grumpy about snow. It reminds me of all my friends because a friend sent it to me and I am thankful for all friends old and new. It reminds me of the great gift of this beautiful natural world that we take for granted and not with gratitude far too often. It reminds me to give gifts often and that gifts need not be expensive to be extravagant. My amazement at this leaf continues to grow and so does my gratitude to and for Sharon for sending it. Reflection on this leaf is becoming a spiritual practice all its own.

Gene Stockton's back is hurting him and he is in pain. I cannot visit him enough. I feel like I can't love him (and his wife Marge) enough. When my foot was broken he drove me to the foot surgeon's office – a doctor he recommended – so many times I can't count. He's phoned me to just check-in on me so many times, just to

make sure I am O.K. – ministering to the minister I can't tell you.

Gene is a trained pastoral visitor and he visits a lot of people at Pathways who are ill or in the hospital. And he spends a lot of time with them. Marge coordinates the Java Team and makes sure you have coffee on Sunday morning, among many other things, you don't see her here grinding coffee, buying coffee, cleaning the kitchen – and not, repeat not yelling at me when I leave it a bit messy and telling me wife and mother don't work here and I need to pick up after myself.

A little while back when Gene and Marge celebrated their 50<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary and we recognized them here at Pathways, I made note that if they are not our first congregational elders, they are on the short list. I'm thankful for everything Gene and Marge do for Pathways and thankful for the ways in which Pathways has responded to them when life has knocked on their door with something that has slowed down their usual pace.

Gratitude is a wonderful thing and a trip to the Gratitude Department is something you want to repeat. Gratitude pays itself forward. Once you taste the yumminess of thanksgiving, you want to keep going and keep it going. Last week I spoke about the nice random act of kindness note I received in my sermon about Grace. This week I received another grace note, this time from one of you. Someone in the congregation sent me a note about last week's sermon - a grace note about grace - Gratitude for Gratitude, Thanks for thanksgiving. That's how it works. This is what it said:

“Thank you for yesterday's lovely sermon. The desire to live life more deliberately is what drove me to look for a church home. Thank you for the reminder to look for the beauty in all things.”

And thank you. This note arrived on a day this past week when I was having a bad day. This note arrived on a day for me that was not full of gratitude, but quite the opposite. Amazing how a note of grace can turn things around. Gratitude is its own reward. That's what we teach in the gratitude department. It's very easy for

ingratitude to take hold and thanksgiving takes practice. The practice is so easy and so yet so easy to forget.

You know, the funny thing about working in the Gratitude Department is that everyone – everyone in the world is on our staff, some folks just don't know it yet.

One of our most celebrated Graceful Appreciation Angels is a minister from up in Missouri. Rev. Will Bowen, he's the minister of Christ Church Unity in Kansas City, MO. Back in 2006 he noticed there was a lot of complaining going on, in his congregation and in the world around him. He realized he might not be able to change the world all at once so he decided to start with his congregation. Steeped in his beliefs, "That our thoughts create our lives, and "Our words indicate what we're thinking," he challenged his congregation to stop complaining completely for 21 days because that's the length of time it takes to break a habit.

Rev. Bowen handed out purple silicon bracelets, much like the yellow Livestrong bracelets, to everyone and asked people to wear

them and move the bracelet from wrist to wrist each time they caught themselves complaining. When a person managed to go three weeks with the bracelet on the same wrist they received a Certificate of Happiness at church.<sup>1</sup>

Gratitude is an attitude. Our gratitude attitude readjustment is free. Wearing a bracelet is good, but sometimes all you need to do is a commit a random act of kindness of your choosing and find a reason to say “Thank You” to the next person with whom you interact. Thank you for stopping by. You’re such wonderful people. I really am truly grateful to know you all.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.csmonitor.com/2008/0219/p20s01-ussc.htm>