

Interfaith Voices GT Column: No One Can Whistle a Symphony

By Alice Henderson Rampton

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A friend came to live with us during a difficult time in his life. He noticed that every Sunday, we attended church as a family. One day, he asked, "Why go to a building to worship God? I find God on the top of a mountain." I agreed that the majesty found on a mountaintop signifies the Creator's hand, but it's often a solitary experience. A building opens up the opportunity to serve others and reach beyond. Major world religions teach of loving and serving one's neighbor. Over the years, organized religion has been rightly accused of various injustices and discriminations. But religion has also been the source of so much good in the world. Early religious organizations brought us the first books, schools, and hospitals. Think of the art, literature, agriculture, music, human rights, languages, laws, truths, and exploration that took root through religious endeavors.

2020 has not been an easy year. Most faith-based organizations have shuttered buildings or limited their attendance. We have sought peace during the global pandemic, partisan politics, and natural disasters. I was grateful for a recent online message of "Hope and Healing" from Russell M. Nelson, President of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. In the eleven-minute video, President Nelson shared how gratitude can be a source of healing. His message, itself, was cathartic.

(https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tlclLxGmVrl&feature=emb_logo)

He quoted Apostle Paul, "In everything give thanks." (1 Thessalonians 5:18) He then asked listeners to reflect on gratitude and post words of thanksgiving on social media, flooding the world with positivity. Check out #GiveThanks and #LightTheWorld

My thoughts turned to the gratitude I feel for my own church congregation and the many other faith-based communities that reach out and serve. Here are a few local examples:

- In 1982, Stone Soup was started at St. Mary's Catholic Church. In 2019, with the additional support of First Christian Church, Westminster House, Beit Am Jewish community, and other groups and congregations, over 31,000 free meals were served by 300 volunteers. On Christmas day, Beit Am will serve 100+ take-out meals to those in need.
- The members of the First Presbyterian Church in Corvallis generously donated to COVID relief efforts and wildfire victims, made grants to CARDV for victims of domestic abuse, and supported meals for kids during school closures.
- The First Methodist Church of Corvallis hosts a shelter called "Room at the Inn" providing a safe emergency home for women during winter months, plus year-round case management. Other churches and non-profits aid in this endeavor.
- Every Wednesday, the Corvallis Evangelical Church provides a "Grab and Go" meal for anyone needing a dinner in their Let's Eat program.
- The Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Corvallis provides fiscal oversight for the Men's Shelter. Several other congregations and non-profits have joined UUF including Northwest Hills Community, Beit Am, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, First Congregational UCC, and Church of the Good Samaritan to provide meals and volunteers. During a non-COVID year, 50 men are sheltered and fed nightly, November 1-March 30.
- The Islamic Center of Corvallis provides housing, food and clothing, and jail chaplaincy to individuals.
- First Congregational UCC, Corvallis Evangelical and First United Methodist all host micro shelters on their properties under the umbrella of <https://www.unityshelter.org>.

This glimpse represents just a few of the local efforts which are daily multiplied millions of times across the globe. There is strength in organized religion and the load is lighter when groups work together. Yale Divinity professor H.E. Luccock once said, "No one can whistle a symphony. It takes a whole orchestra to play it." I'm so grateful for those members of the "orchestra" who share their goodness.