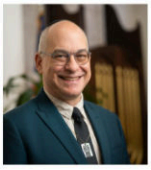
THE SHALOM
TEMPLE SHALOM OF CENTRAL FLORIDA



RABBI ZEV'S REFLECTIONS



Rabbi Zev Sonnenstein

Gratitude Becomes an Act of Welcome

Thanksgiving invites us to notice the people, gifts, and moments that sustain us—and to consider how we can share those blessings. This year, Temple Shalom has an opportunity to put gratitude into practice together.

On Wednesday, November 18, at 3:00 p.m., Temple Shalom will host our Annual Interfaith Thanksgiving Service, "Gather in Gratitude." Neighbors of every faith and background are warmly invited to join us for an afternoon of reflection, music, and fellowship. Our choir will be there, and dessert and coffee will follow the service. Please come and bring a friend.

The service is also a chance to turn gratitude outward. Temple Shalom's Social Action Committee is collecting nonperishable food for Thanksgiving baskets for families in need. Suggested items include coffee and tea, boxed stuffing, instant mashed potatoes, canned vegetables and fruit, and cranberry sauce. Temple gift cards and monetary donations are welcome, too; the committee will use them to shop for families and fill remaining needs. Donations will be accepted through November 18, the day of the service.

A basket of food carries a message beyond its contents: We see you. We care about your family. You are part of our community.

This welcome has deep roots in Jewish tradition. We call it hachnasat orchim, welcoming guests. In the Torah, Abraham sees strangers approaching and runs to greet them. He offers shade, water, and a meal. He does not wait to be asked; he notices what others may need and makes room for them. We can carry that spirit into our lives by sharing a meal, calling someone who may be lonely, inviting a neighbor to join us, or helping provide what another household needs. Gratitude becomes meaningful when it leads to care.

There is much to appreciate in the American tradition of setting aside a day for gratitude. We can celebrate gathering and name our blessings while also making room for the full complexity of history, including the experiences of Indigenous peoples. Jewish tradition teaches that remembrance and reflection belong alongside celebration. We can give thanks, remain honest about the past, and attend to justice in the present.

Please join us November 18 for "Gather in Gratitude." Bring a friend, enjoy the music and refreshments, and, if you can, bring food, a gift card, or a monetary donation. Together, we can turn gratitude into a welcome our neighbors can feel firsthand.

L'shalom u'v'y'didut—in peace and friendship,

Rabbi Zev Sonnenstein