



# THE ALMOND TREE

Immanuel Church-on-the-Hill

The Rev. J. Randolph Alexander, Jr., Rector  
The Rev. David M. Crosby, Associate Rector  
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November 17, 2016

*"I said to the almond tree, 'Sister, speak to me of God.' And the almond tree blossomed." Nikos Kazantzakis*

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## Thanksgiving as a Way to Avoid Spiritual Trip-Hazards

*"In gratitude, in deep gratitude for this moment, this meal, these people, we give ourselves to You, O God. Take us out to live lives as changed people because we have shared the Living Bread and cannot remain the same. Ask much of us, expect much from us, enable much by us, encourage many through us." The Rev. Dr. Mark Anschutz*

In this litigious age we hear municipalities and institutions of all sizes and types speak of trip hazards on their properties. These hazards might include any offset in a pavement or sidewalk that can lead to someone falling. Regular inspections take place to locate these hazards so that they may be repaired. It seems to me this is an approach we might employ to great benefit in our spiritual lives.

There are many *spiritual* trip hazards, common to most of us at one time or another. These can include jealousy, wanting what someone else has, or frustration at our lack of having something. Anger, that we never seem to get past, trips many people. Addiction to various substances trips up others. Guilt for something we did, or didn't do, can knock us down. Fear of getting older can make most of us wobble at one point another. Obsession with gaining power or influence over others can land us on the ground before we know it. At various times a general sense of loss of control can send us reeling. I sometimes think of these hazards as a great buffet table, like a salad bar, where we all partake of some of the poisons from time to time.

I began this column with the prayer above from my friend and mentor, Fr. Anschutz, because it stresses so powerfully, and so succinctly, the importance of a great balm for our souls: thankfulness. To be grateful, thankful, is to focus on what we have already received, stressing our blessings and not our shortcomings. A thankful heart is a lighter heart, a more content heart, and a heart more at peace with itself and the world.

There have been times when I wanted to pray but I was a jumble of emotions. At those moments I simply couldn't begin the prayer I so desperately wanted to pray. So I started naming blessings for which I was thankful. They often tumble out in no particular order--things from childhood, relationship, experiences, faith, places where I have served, Immanuel. In those moments I was taken out of myself, I felt centered, and free. I encourage you to try this approach in times when you might find it a challenge to pray.

What would it be like to lead with gratitude, with thanksgiving, in our lives? What would it be like to have a journal or a document on our computers where we simply list blessings? What would it be like to mention these blessings in conversations, naming God as their source? I believe we would gradually be changed people.

Our great national holiday of Thanksgiving approaches. Might this be an opportunity to list some blessings? Our annual Stewardship campaign at Immanuel continues, after a very encouraging and promising start. Have you pledged yet? Have you set aside some time to name some blessings, and some of the ways you plan to give back to God, for God's great purposes in the world, from those blessings? Our parish home, Immanuel, needs and deserves our prayers, our time, our talents, our witness, and yes, our financial support.

Happy Thanksgiving to you all,  
Randy+

*Thou hast given so much to me, give one thing more, a grateful heart. . .  
Not thankful when it pleaseth me; as if Thy blessings had spare days:  
But such a heart whose pulse may be Thy praise.*

George Herbert, poet and priest, 1593-1633

**Please join us for our Thanksgiving  
Eucharist, at 10:00 a.m., November 24, in  
the Zabriskie Chapel.**



*And the king will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.'* (Matthew 25:40)

For many families at Immanuel it would not be Christmas without bringing the good news of Christ's coming and God's love in a very tangible form – a toy to grow with, clothing to keep warm in – to another family, transforming a bleak Christmas into the light of Christ present.

We will have about 100 families designated by Child Protective Services and 10 – 15 families from the Alexandria Community Shelter. **You can sign up to buy gifts for a family**, or part of one, before or after each service on three Sundays, Nov. 20, Nov. 27 and Dec. 4, or outside the parish office in between.

In addition, **used computers** (in good working condition, with or without an offer of set-up and some initial orientation), **used bicycles, good used toys and children's books, calendars you receive in the mail, and gently used clothing and blankets** (for children and adults), especially warm winter coats and clothes to wear to a new-found job, are very welcome. (Please label packages of clothing as to kind and size.)

All contributions will be collected and presented at the Altar at the services on Dec. 11; or you can bring them to the parish office.

Connie Kurz and her team buy children's books in quantity very cheaply. The books will be on display in the parish hall on Sunday, Nov. 27. **You can select some books (2 – 3 for each child) for your adopted family.** We will prepare a set of books for each remaining family.

If you prefer, **you can contribute money and we will do the shopping for you.** Please make your check out to Immanuel and mark it "Christmas Families". Gifts bought with contributed money will be wrapped during the forum hour on Dec. 11. **The special offering on Dec. 11 is dedicated to Christmas Families.**

**There are many opportunities to help** with fixing bicycles (starting now; the experts will show you how), Internet and in-store shopping to take advantage of Black Friday sales, arranging and tagging the toys (Sa Dec. 10, 9 am -), sorting gifts (M Dec. 12 9 am -), transportation, data input. See, call, or email Linda Serabian. If you can help with assigning books, call Connie Kurz. More detail at [www.icoh.net](http://www.icoh.net), look under Newsroom.

Let us brighten many children's Christmas, bringing them some of the joys and opportunities of God's new creation, a light in our own celebration.

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**VESTRY ELECTIONS APPROACHING:** Come be part of the dozen members who help shape Immanuel's future! A vestry term is a short three years and brings wonderful opportunity to guide our parish to new growth and deepen our worship and community. Ask any current or past vestry member about this genuinely rewarding experience. We'll be announcing the slate in January and vestry elections will be held at the Annual Meeting on January 22. If you are interested in tossing your hat in the ring, or have any questions, please contact our Senior Warden, Doug Onley, at [dougandkam@verizon.net](mailto:dougandkam@verizon.net) or 443-248-7885.

**WALK IN LOVE...STEWARDSHIP AT IMMANUEL:** Please consider prayerfully God's many blessings in your life, and the ways in which you give back from all that you have been given: of your time, talent, and treasure. You may still mail in your pledges to the parish office, or you may pledge online via the parish webpage [www.icoh.net](http://www.icoh.net).

## Pumpkin Patch – the Final Report



Our 23<sup>rd</sup> season selling pumpkins was a great success. After paying state sales taxes and paying the consignor of the pumpkins, we have a combined profit of \$60,296! The breakdown on profit categories is as follows: Pumpkins \$36,809; Crafts \$792; Food and baked goods \$17,540, and donations \$ 5,155.

Our Pumpkin Patch is the one endeavor that allows everyone to participate according to their abilities. You all deserve our collective gratitude. Singling out and naming individuals always runs the risk of omission, so let us give our enthusiastic thanks to the following:

- THANKS to those who toiled unloading the trucks!
- THANKS to those who took one or more stints selling pumpkins!
- THANKS to the day managers who helped coordinate operations!
- THANKS to those who made delicious cakes, cookies, pies, and soups!
- THANKS to the crews who peeled apples and packaged the apple crisps!
- THANKS to our knitters who made dozens of caps!
- THANKS to the set-up crew that got the patch ready for 30 days of sales!
- THANKS to the close-out and clean-up crews!
- THANKS to those who worked behind the scenes on computers, arranging truck deliveries, scheduling sellers, coordinating cooking and baking, arranging bulk sales, and publicity!
- THANKS to the Outreach Committee for their planning and leadership!
- THANKS to the Clergy and Parish Staff for their patience and understanding while we took up space and used the narthex, kitchen, parking areas, and the grounds for an entire month!

All our profits will go to our outreach ministries which include over 30 charitable organizations and causes located internationally, regionally, and locally, including: Training nurses in the Congo, support for a congregation in Malawi, assistance to orphans and neglected children in Haiti, support for church schools in Costa Rica, social services to Indians in Montana, assistance in rehabilitating offenders, Five Talents micro-lending, ALIVE, Alexandria neighborhood health services, Carpenters Shelter, Community Lodging, Senior Services of Alexandria, West End Lazarus Ministry ... and others. You made all this possible. What a Blessing!



**ADVENT IS COMING, ARE YOU GETTING EXCITED?** Begin the season of joyous anticipation and come make a family Advent wreath. Families of all ages are once again invited to join us for this year's Advent Family Work Shop. Immanuel will be hosting this fantastic workshop on the first Sunday in Advent, November 27 from 1:00-3:30 p.m., in the Parish Hall. There will be lunch, wreath making materials and plenty of opportunities for fun, fellowship and a little learning. A selection of baked chicken, eggplant parmesan, salad, and refreshments will be provided. Please

feel free to bring a side or main dish to share should you prefer something additional.

Wreath-making materials will be made available, but all are kindly asked, if possible, to bring blue ribbon. In addition, you are also invited to bring any additional materials you wish to add to your wreaths or to share with others. For example, holly and evergreen cuttings are two materials that are always in high demand but forever in short supply and we will be grateful for any donations received. Please stay tuned for more information. In the meantime, if you have any questions or would like to help in any way please contact John Hogg at [jhogg@icoh.net](mailto:jhogg@icoh.net).

**ORDINATION:** God willing, and the people consenting, our former seminarian, Rachel Shows Rickenbaker, will be ordained to the Sacred Order of Priests on Saturday, December 10 at 10:30 a.m. at Church of the Good Shepherd, Burke.

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**ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED**



Lectionary Readings and  
Schedule of Services



**November 20, The Last Sunday after Pentecost, Christ the King**

Jeremiah 23:1-6, Canticle 4; Colossians 1:11-20; Luke 23:33-43

7:45 a.m., HEI and 9:00 a.m., HE II, Zabriskie Chapel; 11:15 a.m., HEII, Immanuel Chapel

**November 27, The First Sunday of Advent (Begin Lectionary Year A)**

Isaiah 2:1-5; Psalm 122; Romans 13:11-14; Matthew 24:36-44

7:45 a.m., HEI, and 9:00 a.m., HEII, Zabriskie Chapel, 11:15 a.m., HEII, Immanuel Chapel

**December 4, The Second Sunday of Advent**

Isaiah 11:1-10; Psalm 72:1-7, 18-19; Romans 15:4-13; Matthew 3:1-12

7:45 a.m., HEI, and 9:00 a.m., Holy Baptism and HE II, Zabriskie Chapel

11:15 a.m., Holy Baptism and HEII, Immanuel Chapel