

# REFLECTIONS

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WILLOW BROOK CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES

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## LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Gentle Readers,

Have you ever considered gratitude as a spiritual practice, not just at this time of year, but every day of the year? If you were to write down three things each day to be thankful for, how might it change your life? These are questions to ponder as we move into the darkness of the late autumn and early winter when the weather turns colder and the sun is hidden beneath a swath of grey.

For me, practicing gratitude comes down to the challenge of finding the extraordinary in the ordinary goings-on of life. There is a Zen koan you may have heard of that comes to mind:

**"Before enlightenment; chop wood, carry water  
After enlightenment; chop wood, carry water"**

While interpretations abound, what emerges for me is how our perception and approach can impact our life: daily tasks, the work we do, the actions we take. If we choose to lead with gratitude, to find purpose and value in the chopping of the wood and the carrying of the water, not only do we find new meaning in the day-to-day, but we honor our Creator.

There is power in gratitude, in being grateful for the people, places, and events that make up our days, because those days make up our lives. In a hurting and broken world, practicing gratitude is not always easy, but it does connect us with the Divine. Is there anything to be more grateful for?

Cover Photo: Centerpiece for the annual assisted living and transitional living family Harvest Dinner at Willow Brook at Delaware Run's campus.

Photo by Amy Santarelli

## WILLOW BROOK CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES

*Three campuses • Not-for-profit • Churches of Christ*

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Troy McKnight, CEO of Willow Brook Christian Communities.

# FIRESIDE CHATS WITH CEO TROY MCKNIGHT

## EMBRACE JOY, HAVE GRATITUDE


**W**e're busy! Busy schedules, busy conversations, busy lives. I've commonly heard in the world of retirees, "I'm busier now than I was when I was working." In the hustle and bustle of our daily lives, it's easy to overlook the small moments that bring us joy. We often find ourselves caught up in the whirlwind of responsibilities, deadlines, and the constant push to achieve more. Yet, amidst this chaos, there are countless instances that deserve our attention and appreciation.

Consider the vibrant yellows, oranges and reds of the changing fall leaves. A rare sunny afternoon in late November. The smell of a fresh cup of coffee, or freshly baked cookies. The friendly hello at the gas station or a wave from a neighbor. These moments, though seemingly insignificant, weave the fabric of our lives, adding richness and depth to our experiences.

Reflecting on these moments can transform our perspective. It allows us to shift our focus from what we lack to what we have, fostering a sense of contentment and fulfillment. This shift is not about ignoring challenges or pretending that everything is perfect.

Rather, it's about recognizing the beauty and value in the everyday occurrences that often go unnoticed. At Willow Brook, teammates often experience countless small, precious moments with residents and families. These moments might include a shared laugh over a favorite story, a comforting touch during a difficult time, or the joy of celebrating a milestone together. Whether it's a simple smile exchanged in passing or a heartfelt conversation, these interactions create a deep sense of connection and community. They remind us of the importance of compassion and the meaningful impact that genuine human interaction can have on our lives.

As we navigate through life's ups and downs, taking a moment to pause and reflect on these positive experiences can have a profound impact on us. It reminds us of the good that exists in our lives and helps us to cultivate a mindset of appreciation.

So as you go about your busy day, take a moment to notice and cherish these moments. Embrace the joy they bring and let them remind you of the importance of gratitude. 

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# A COLLECTION: STORIES OF

## GRATITUDE FOR WILLOW BROOK

by Trudy Mason, a Willow Brook Christian Village resident

On a beautiful spring day this past May, we moved into our Independent Living apartment at Willow Brook Christian Village. Our relater supplied pizza for the packing team the previous day, and we ate it that day for lunch and dinner, then breakfast and lunch on move-in day. After the movers left, we decided that despite our well-worn t-shirts and dirty work jeans, we'd venture into the Courtyard Restaurant for a "real meal." The place was full of laughter; the people were all strangers, and guess what? It was pizza night! We laughed at the irony.

It's fall now. Colorful leaves fall outside our windows. Towers of boxes are long gone; pictures are hung; and faces in the restaurant are changing from those of strangers to those of friends. Coffee hours, Bible studies, bus trips, fine arts group meetings, and special events are beginning to fill our calendars. The community garden plot has been readied for the cold weather, with tomatoes harvested and the last daisy cut.

Family and old friends have visited for a tour and meal; we sit with new friends, swapping stories about moving to Willow Brook and learning about common interests.

And the feeling that fills our hearts? Gratitude. Gratitude for the phenomenal administrative staff that coordinated our move-in; the seasoned nurse who processed our intake; the office workers that signed for dozens of packages as we ordered furniture and other items; the maintenance team that completed our work orders; the welcome committee that brought us incredible homemade jam; the dining room staff who learned our names and fed us faithfully; the housekeeping staff that cleaned each month; the prayer group that supported us during my unexpected surgery. And so many more!

Gratitude surrounds us. Thank you, Willow Brook.



Photo by Christina Dresdow

Trudy Mason and her husband Michael enjoying their first Fall Fest at Willow Brook Christian Village.

# GRATITUDE

Photo by John Regalsky



Photographer unknown



Photo by Christina Dresdow



(Left to right) Connie and Len Zuga, Christmas 1997, donning their matching OSU shirts. Connie and Len by the Willow Brook bus, outside the Columbus International Airport, before Len went on Honor Flight Ohio. And Connie and Len presenting to their fellow residents, about their most recent trip to the Antarctic.

## A RING AT THE GAME, AND THANKSGIVING AROUND THE WORLD

by Len Zuga, a Willow Brook at Delaware Run resident


After receiving my Navy commission upon graduation from The Ohio State University at the end of summer quarter in 1966, I attended a couple of Navy Schools, first at Newport Rhode Island, and then at The Great Lakes Naval Training Center near Chicago, Illinois. Before heading to Chicago, I stopped in Columbus, Ohio to visit my then-girlfriend, Connie. It was the Saturday before Thanksgiving, and at the time it was also The Game - the big OSU-Michigan game. It was there, at The Game, that I officially proposed to Connie, ring and all.

Though I am not really a football fan it has been tradition ever since that day, whenever possible, wherever we are, that we watch the OSU-Michigan game to celebrate the anniversary of that chilly proposal weekend. On November 20, 1966, the Buckeyes lost, but I won!

On our first Thanksgiving as a married couple, I had Thanksgiving dinner aboard my ship while pier-side in Subic Bay in the Philippines, and Connie dined in Long Beach California, our home port.

Another Thanksgiving day that left us with vivid memories was in 1972. While at the Naval Postgraduate school in Monterey, California, we rented a house on a hillside overlooking Monterey Bay. During dinner with friends, a small earthquake shook the house and table, rattling the dishes. As all four of us grabbed on to the table, someone yelled, "Earthquake!" A first for us.

This Thanksgiving will be our 57th as a married couple. Unfortunately, we did not record many of those other 55 locations where we had Thanksgiving dinners but they ranged far and wide around the country and globe. One was in London, another in Paris. Each memorable, but sans-turkey: we made do with sole in London, and duck in Paris.

We have been blessed and are so grateful for the wonderful travel experiences over these 57 years, and the friends that we made on them that have expanded our Christmas greetings list, as we still stay in touch with many across the country. 

# Gratitude

by Brenda Spradling, a Willow Brook at Delaware Run resident

Gratitude is a very personal choice

To adopt an attitude

Of thanksgiving!

Family, friends, care, shelter and love.

God blesses us each day in many ways!

Be grateful——Give thanks!!!!



Photo by John Regalsky



Willow Brook at Delaware Run resident Tom Moore and his daughter Randy, standing in front of the new fountain at Willow Brook at Delaware Run. Tom and his family donated the fountain earlier this year, in memory of his late wife, LaVonnie. All have been enjoying its beauty as the seasons change.

# GIFT OF LOVE AWARD RECIPIENT AT WILLOW BROOK CHRISTIAN HOME 2024

If you recall from our last issue, The Gift of Love Award is presented to a volunteer who has actively invested generous time and effort for the benefit of our Willow Brook residents during the past year. This year our award at Willow Brook Christian Home was presented to Don Rivers. Don has given his time and talent, his love of music, comedy, and fellowship with our residents.

Photo by Christina Dresdow



(Left to right) Willow Brook Christian Home activities assistant Chris Cerminara, executive director David Chappell, Gift of Love recipient Don Rivers, and activities director Christy Turner.

## HOLDING GRIEF

In this season of gratitude, it is important to acknowledge the elephant in the room: grief. Far too frequently, we fail to address the realities of grief and loss, especially during the holiday season. You are not alone if you are grieving, whether it be the loss of a beloved person or animal, an ability, a way of life, a home or city, an event, or something else.

The thing about the grief process is that it is not linear—you do not methodically process through various stages and your grief is gone. Truthfully, with grief and loss, it does not get better, it gets different. One's grief does not change, the capacity to hold it does.

While the societal expectation often defaults to "get over it" and "move on," this is not realistic. Did you know that the first three months to a year after the loss of a spouse or loved one, the overwhelming emotion is numbness? Only around the 2.5-year mark can one consider a new normal or begin to figure out who they are without their loved one.

In the days and weeks ahead, let us be aware of the grief that often accompanies this season. If you are grieving, speak and name your grief. Reach out to a trusted loved one, friend, or chaplain/spiritual leader. You may also seek support from the 988 Lifeline via call, chat, or text (the web address is [988lifeline.org](http://988lifeline.org)). This is a free, confidential service staffed 24/7 by trained volunteers who can listen and help you get through the challenges you are facing as you grieve.

If you love someone who is grieving, remember that the goal is not to "fix" the sadness or provide advice but to be present and listen with grace and understanding. Other small yet meaningful gestures might include sending a card or flowers, assisting with meals, shopping, or housekeeping, and checking in frequently to see how the person is doing.

Finally, let us let kindness rule the day, for we never know what people are going through. 

Photo by Christina Dresdow



The cross beside the fireplace during a prayer service at Willow Brook Christian Home.

# REFLECTIONS

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Willow Brook resident, Mary Rees,  
standing in front of the traveling Wall  
of Healing Vietnam War Memorial.  
Photo by Christina Dresdow



A number of our residents and teammates at Willow Brook Christian Village and Willow Brook at Delaware Run had the honor of visiting the traveling Vietnam War Memorial: The Wall of Healing, when it came to Delaware, Ohio at the beginning of fall this year. A range of emotions arise when experiencing this replica of the larger memorial in Washington D.C. But a profound one is gratitude. Gratitude for the soldiers who fought and lost their lives during the war, gratitude for those who survived, yet sacrificed so much of themselves. Many of them weren't thanked or recongized when they came home. So Willow Brook would like to say now, to all Vietnam veterans: thank you for your service!