



Dear Oli Family:

Large gatherings have fallen out of favor recently, but I invited almost fifty people to my house for Thanksgiving yesterday. Not to be defiant. Not to tempt fate. Just to create a window of normalcy for our students in the midst of this reality-twisting pandemic.

The diligent efforts of faculty, students, and parents have allowed Oliverian to create and maintain the bubble of safety that allowed our normal-ish Thanksgiving feast. I am immensely thankful to all of you for those efforts. I am thankful to our nurse, Michelle Austin, for actively seeking ways to honor both her nurse's oath and her mom's commitment to warmth, connection, and comfort. I am thankful to our faculty who uncomplainingly sacrificed a week of vacation and a holiday with their own families to keep your child safe and nurtured. I am thankful to Sharon McCallie-Steller for raising five sumo-worthy turkeys (two of whom I had the honor of pardoning earlier this week!). I am thankful for Abby Hood and Connor Fahey and Greg Vogel and Janice Hatch and Lee Morrison and Bessa Axelrod, who surrendered their own holiday plans to create a seamless experience for your child--complete with mud football, a Macy's Day Parade, lazy football viewing, holiday arts and crafts, dessert baking, and on and on. I am grateful for Jim Macdonald, who cooked a glutton's feast for his Oliverian family even while managing a health emergency in his own family. I am thankful to Ben Jones and Barclay Mackinnon for allowing us to commandeer their homes for overflow dining (and to Barclay for remembering to pick up the chocolate and cookies!). I am thankful to my wife, Beth, for preparing our home (and Ben's and Barclay's) as if for her own family.



I am also grateful to our students--your children--for wearing masks, keeping their distance, washing their hands, following inconvenient quarantine requirements, and allowing Michelle to periodically probe their nostrils. It is really their efforts that have been the most critical (and surprising--these are teenagers, after all!), for keeping Oliverian (knock on wood) 100% COVID free, which is a rarity among boarding schools and programs. When I recently commended one student for his unprompted mask wearing (which he resisted early on), he said, "I am putting aside my personal convictions for the greater good."

That comment may represent what I am most grateful for this Thanksgiving. My 1965 birth year makes me

officially, if barely, a member of the "Me Generation"--so called because of our collective departure from traditional values like selflessness and civic duty in favor of hedonism and self-indulgence. Fifty-five years later, here I am working with members of the so-called "Generation Me"--the recycled nomenclature hinting that my own generation's narcissism may be less of a cultural fad than a societal direction. So it is reassuring to see how the collective suffering of the day is, perhaps, chasing us out of ourselves and toward each other. You might not see evidence of that on whatever cable news channel you watch, but I see it here everyday. My faculty and, with greater and greater frequency, our students, set aside their personal comfort, wants, and wishes for the good of each other.

In this me-first era, I wonder what could be more important...or worthier of our gratitude.

Happy Thanksgiving.

Warmly and hopefully,

Will

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