



**Mario J. Paredes**  
Chief Executive Officer  
mparedes@somoscommunitycare.org  
646.979.7613

## **What Reasons Do We Have for GIVING THANKS?**

Mario J. Paredes

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This coming Thursday, November 23, we will celebrate the most important holiday in the United States, Thanksgiving Day. As its name indicates, it is a day to give thanks, be thankful, and remember and recognize the reasons that motivate and justify celebrating a personal, family, social, and national “Thanksgiving.”

Like so many other dates and celebrations in life, our materialistic, mercantilist, and consumerist society has vacated essential dates of all their meaning and significance for our society and world. Everything seemingly devolves toward the commercial game of supply and demand. We celebrate without knowing what we celebrate. In this case, we celebrate without discovering the reasons to be thankful. Or, if we do, we are not grateful.

Gratitude is an essential dimension in the life of human beings. Gratitude is born from the possibility of finding the gift of grace in life. Gratitude is born from the possibility of discovering blessings and gifts that we all receive and have that are not bought or sold. The discovery of the little things in life enables gratitude, and gratitude enables joy and happiness for all.

Only grateful people are happy. Grateful people discover gifts in everyday existence and reasons to give thanks. And there are many reasons to give thanks. Some because they make us happy, please us, do us good, and others because they teach us solidarity, tolerance, acceptance, understanding, forgiveness, etc., in the art of living.

This holiday, a national day of celebration, asks us to go beyond petty interests and our small individual joys and enable ourselves to feel as though we are part of society, the nation, and the entire human community. In doing this, we can ask ourselves what reasons we have to be grateful, not only as human beings but also as citizens of this nation and the world.

While it is true that, individually and as a family, we will always find reasons to give thanks, structurally, socially, and globally speaking, it may be more difficult for us today to find reasons to be grateful, reasons that, at the same time, are reasons to continue living and waiting.

At this historical, social, political, and economic juncture, at the national and global level, I ask myself, for example: can we give thanks in the face of terrorism, wars (especially the Russia-Ukraine war and the Israel-Palestine war), the thirst for revenge, in the face of injustice and violence, human cruelty and so many forms of death?

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2910 EXTERIOR STREET, 1ST FLOOR • BRONX, NY 10463 • SOMOSNYHEALTH.ORG • 1 833 SOMOSNY (1.833.766.6769)



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To give thanks, ignoring the seriousness of the present historical juncture in which we are all immersed across the globe, and which impacts us all in many ways, would be to err on the side of superficiality and frivolity.

I wonder if we can celebrate Thanksgiving when faced with so many of our brothers and sisters who live in inhumane conditions unsuitable for humanity.

I ask myself, what truth, value, and meaning can we assign to giving thanks in a nation and world that suffers divisions, inequities, intolerance, and discrimination of all kinds?

Can we give thanks amidst the suffering of so many who must abandon their loved ones, lands, families, and homelands and submit to the inclemency of migrations where they risk and lose everything, almost always, up to life itself?

Can we give thanks in societies where millions of men and women live amidst abandonment and loneliness?

Should we give thanks in a world where public service, in political and government positions, has become an opportunity for illicit enrichment, corruption, and contempt for the common welfare?

I ask myself, who do we give thanks in a world where privileged minorities live in comfort and waste, while millions of their fellow human beings are sentenced to death before they are born, condemned to poverty and hunger, innocent people relegated to an undignified life because they lack social opportunities? Why do we give thanks in a world where millions of the fallen suffer from our indifference and lack of compassion?

What meaning does our celebration of Thanksgiving have amidst crowds of young people who are searching, disoriented, for their place in society and the world, with families torn apart and lives lost for lack of values, in the midst of vices and vanities?

There are many more faces of men and women who suffer and cry out for an opportunity on earth. There are many more anxieties and painful situations that arise from the lack of respect for the dignity of the human being.

All these faces, situations, and questions should awaken our numb, comfortable, and indifferent consciences so that we wonder about the meaning of our national celebration of THANKSGIVING.

But, above all, we should be motivated, with everyone's commitment and effort, to build families, personal and family histories, interpersonal and social relationships, institutions, and structures that fill us with hope for a better world than this one, the one in which we happen to live.



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This moment, right now, nationally and globally, demands – like so few other times in history – the awakened conscience and active solidarity of all men and women on earth.

Together, we must build a nation and world with reasons to give thanks, be happy, and live with hope. We must build a Nation in which, one day a year and every day of the year, we live full of reasons to be grateful, believe, love, be happy, and continue waiting.

*Mario J. Paredes is CEO of SOMOS Community Care, a network of 2,500 independent physicians—most of them primary care providers—serving close to a million of New York City’s most vulnerable Medicaid patients.*