

mud puddles

by Dr. Robert Hicks, columnist

Friendship as steadfast love

A member of our church sent me a copy of her personal tribute to a circle of nine friends who, for years, were intentional about keeping alive their friendship and deepening it through every hurdle, hurt, and joy this life brought their way. Reading it filled my heart with memories of my own lifelong friends who, if I needed them, would not think twice about catching a flight out to be by my side. And they all know I would do the exact same thing for them, not out of obligation, but out of the deep love we share and the many storms we have weathered together. This goes far beyond what can be expressed on a \$4.95 Hallmark card. It is maybe best captured in the Hebrew word, *hesed*, translated into English as “steadfast love,” which is the primary word used for how the writers of the Hebrew scriptures understood God’s attentive presence. *Hesed* is the “I’m-there-for-you-no-matter-what” friendship that makes us strong, compassionate, and generous in ways that reach far beyond the confines of our inner circles.

If you are fortunate to have a close friend who has been steadfastly by your side empowering you to be a better man or woman than you ever thought possible, then write a note of thanks that they will read over and over again

letting them know how you feel for their presence in your life.

With her permission, I include the following tribute from a woman who nurtures this life of steadfast love in hopes that it will remind each of us how lifegiving is the enduring love of a friend.

Nine hearts, one spirit

A story of friendship and giving



In a quiet corner of Minnesota, where the seasons roll in with grace and the trees whisper stories of time, nine Christian women gather in celebration — not just of birthdays, but of life, love, and purpose.

They call themselves “The Birthday Circle,” though their bond stretches far beyond cake and candles. Each month, they come together to honor one of their own. There’s laughter, prayer, shared memories, and the kind of warmth that only years of friendship can kindle. But there’s something more — something quietly powerful.

Instead of gifts, each woman contributes \$10. The birthday honoree doesn’t pocket the sum; she chooses a charity close to her heart. Sometimes it’s a local food shelf, sometimes a children’s ministry, sometimes a global mission. Each donation becomes a ripple of kindness, extending their circle far beyond their living rooms and coffee shops.

It’s not about the amount. It’s about intention. It’s about

saying, “Your life matters, and so does your love for others.”

Over the years, their giving has touched dozens of causes. But perhaps the greatest gift is the one they give each other: a sacred space to be seen, celebrated, and supported. In a world that often rushes past quiet acts of kindness, these nine women have chosen to slow down, lift each other up, and let their friendship be a vessel for grace.

They are mothers, grandmothers, sisters in faith. They’ve weathered loss, rejoiced in new beginnings, and prayed each other through the valleys. And through it all, their birthdays have become more than milestones — they’ve become moments of mission.

Their gatherings are simple — coffee brewed strong, hugs held long, and prayers spoken with sincerity. But within that simplicity lies something sacred. Each woman brings her own story: of faith tested and renewed, of families grown and scattered, of quiet triumphs and tender losses. And in this circle, every story is honored.

They don’t just celebrate birthdays. They celebrate resilience. They celebrate the kind of love that shows up year after year, through every season of life. And with each donation made in honor of a friend’s special day, they send a message to the world: Generosity is a form of worship, and friendship is a ministry.

The charities they support may never know the full story behind the gift. But somewhere, a child is fed, a shelter is strengthened, a mission is funded — and it all began with nine women choosing to live out their faith in the most personal way.

As the years pass, the circle remains unbroken. New wrinkles form, new joys arise, and the giving continues. Because for these nine hearts, friendship isn’t just a blessing — it’s a calling.

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notices

Hart Township Candidate Filing Notice
NOTICE OF ANNUAL MEETING & ROCK BIDS

Affidavits of candidacy for **1 Township Supervisor** (3-year term) and **Clerk** (2-year term) may be filed with the clerk beginning on December 30, 2025 through January 13, 2026. All filings must be at the Hart Town Hall by 5 pm January 13, 2026 with hours open for filing from 1-5 pm on January 13, 2026. Filing fee is \$2.00.

Hart Township will be taking sealed bids for rock spread on township roads. Majority of material to be spread before July 31, 2026. The sealed bids must be in the hands of the Clerk by March 10, 2026 by 3:30 p.m. Certificate of liability must be provided from accepted bid. Annual Meeting, March 10, 2026 at 4 pm at the Hart Town Hall.

Township election will be held after Annual Meeting from 5 pm to 8 pm. The bad weather alternative date for the election and annual meeting will be held on March 17, 2026.

Hart Township
Gail Schwanbeck, Clerk

IMPORTANT PROPERTY TAX HOMESTEAD NOTICE

This will affect your 2026 property taxes and eligibility for Property Tax Refund.

Have you purchased or moved into a property in the past year?
Contact your county assessor to file a homestead application if you or a qualifying relative occupy the property as a homestead on or before December 31, 2025.

Is a qualifying relative living in the property?
For a residential property, a qualifying relative includes the uncle, aunt, nephew, niece, child, grandchild, sibling, or parent of the owner or owner's spouse. For agricultural property, a qualifying relative can be a child, grandchild, sibling or parent of the owner or spouse of the owner.

When do I apply?
You must apply on or before December 31, 2025.

Contact the assessor by December 31, 2025, if the use of the property you own or occupy as a qualifying relative has changed during the past year.

If you sell, move, or for any reason no longer qualify for the homestead classification, you are required to notify the county assessor within 30 days of the change in homestead status.

Winona County Assessor's Office (507) 457-6300

miscellaneous

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