

5 Terrific Ways to Celebrate an All-Ages Thanksgiving in your congregation

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1. Host an "I'm thankful" songfest.

Prior to Thanksgiving Day, invite people of all ages to go through your hymn book and choose a favourite. If possible, ask them to say, in one sentence, why they are thankful for this hymn. For instance, "My very favourite hymn is 'All things bright and beautiful.' When my children were small, I rocked all of them to sleep singing that hymn, and it brings back wonderful memories for me." Set aside 15 minutes in the worship service or just prior to worship and enjoy singing the hymns together.

2. Set up Thanksgiving activity stations.

Set up Thanksgiving activity stations and encourage children and youth to invite adults to join them in one. Here are some suggestions:

A vegetable soup station

Invite everyone to bring one vegetable to church prior to worship. Bring a large stock pot and some bouillon cubes. Wash, peel and cube the vegetables. Then cook the Thanksgiving soup. Simmer while worship is on, then enjoy the soup after worship. Crusty bread is a nice addition.

A count-your-blessings collage

Set up a wall of poster board or run a plain paper table cloth down a row of tables. Invite everyone in the congregation to write or draw or glue a magazine picture of something for which they are thankful.

Make a Shema

The *shema*—"Hear, O Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord alone. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength" is from Deuteronomy 6:4-5. Jewish people still keep the *shema* in a small box called a mezuzah on the doorposts of their homes. Every time they go in and out of their homes, it reminds them how to live. Invite people to write the *shema* on a strip of parchment paper, then use a small cardboard jewelry box with lid, put the *shema* inside and use paint, glitters, markers, buttons to decorate the box. Invite people to think of where they will post it.

Thank you bank

Ask people to think of something for which they are thankful—good health, a source of clean water, family and friends. Identify a charity which is appropriate, then provide materials to make piggy banks. Have participants decorate cans, jars or boxes to illustrate the charity for which they will save money.

mezuzah



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3. All-ages Thanksgiving thoughts in worship.

Prior to Thanksgiving worship, invite people of all ages to describe, in one or two sentences, something they are thankful for. You may give them some categories—thanksgiving for the community, world, food, nature, friends, families, church, hands, ourselves, Jesus.

4. Hold a Thanksgiving nature walk.

It's a wonderful time to be outdoors. If you have someone in your congregation who is a naturalist, invite him/her to lead a walk through a park or nearby woods. If you do this prior to worship, bring back items from nature for a display table. Alternatively, carry along a trash container and clean up signs of human contamination.

5. Host an extended-family turkey dinner.

Many people put a family turkey dinner at the heart of their Thanksgiving celebrations, but there are lots of church members who do not have family nearby. Invite people to sign up for an extended-family turkey dinner in a community hall or your church basement. Ask people to sign up for something they would like to bring...or to make a cash contribution to buying the turkey. If you think people in your congregation might be sensitive about being seen as a "charity case", invite one family to "host" and invite others.

