

Thanksgiving Activities for the Family

Show and Thanks

Create a more meaningful time of sharing what you are most thankful for. Ask each member of the family to bring one item that represents what they are grateful for this year. It may be as simple as a good report card or as impactful as a hospital bracelet from a successful surgery or baby's birth.

Thanksgiving Table

Designate a particular tablecloth for your family Thanksgiving celebrations. Provide fabric markers where guests can record their "gratitudes" or special prayers for the year ahead. Ask your guests to sign and date each message, as you'll be using the same tablecloth year after year.

Thank You Notes

Set up an area with paper, pens and colors for everyone to write thank you notes to someone who has blessed them in some way this year. They can thank family members, friends, or teachers. They can also write a thank you to God. Younger children can draw pictures. Let everyone who wishes read their notes aloud during the meal.

Thanksgiving ABC's

Play a fun game with the ABC's and thanks. Start with saying something that you are thankful for that starts with the letter "A" and go through all the letters of the alphabet. Have members take turns or have each person share a "thanks" for each letter.

Thanksgiving Blessing Cards

Write each person's name across the top of a card. Set these cards out and have everyone write something about that person for which they are thankful on the back. During dessert, gather the cards and take turns reading and blessing each person at the table.

Give a Thanksgiving Blessing

DINE IN: Consider inviting someone that might be alone or needy to share the bounty at your Thanksgiving celebration. Invite them to join your family for a meal and informal time spent playing games, doing puzzles, telling stories, singing or just hanging out together.

DELIVERY: Plan to cook double the amount of food that you need for your family. If you usually have family members make different items to bring to your feast, ask if they will double the recipe and bring in two separate dishes. Check with the church or local schools to find a family in need. Contact the family and let them know that you will be bringing them a Thanksgiving feast and arrange details for delivery. Either before or after enjoying your meal, pack up and deliver the food. Spend time praying with the family before you leave.

Grateful Rolls

As guests arrive, have each person write a few things that they are grateful for on small sheets of paper. Make your own special roll recipe or bake pre-packaged crescent rolls. Place the papers on the dough wedges, roll them up into the crescent shape and follow the baking directions. When the rolls are served, pass them around and enjoy the moment as each guest tears into their hot roll and reads what someone else at the table is grateful for. Have fun guessing who wrote each "thanks."

Further Resources

Intentional Holiday Tools

Get ideas for Thanksgiving and Christmas by listening to the free podcast available on CD at the HomePointe Center or download at homepointe.org. You can also get the free Christmas@Home guide filled with practical ideas to help your family focus on the reason for the season.

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A Family Guide to Gratitude

How can you make this holiday mean more than just turkey and football? Choose one or several of these ideas to help your family enjoy fun Thanksgiving traditions while expressing thanks to God for His many blessings.

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Hungry, Hungry Thank You's

Help younger children anticipate giving thanks with this simple, fun game.

1. Gather the children or entire family together before sitting down for the meal to enjoy a game designed to emphasize why we give thanks.
2. If you own the game "Hungry Hungry Hippos" get it ready. If not, create your own version by placing about 20-30 marbles on a large paper plate and giving each player a spoon with which they will pick up the marbles.
3. As the children anticipate starting the game, pause and invite the oldest child to read I Thessalonians 5:16-18: "Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus."
4. Afterwards ask the following questions:
Q: What is God's will for us?
A: To give thanks.
Q: Why do we give thanks?
A: To experience joy.
5. Tell the children that one of the most important ways we fill our hunger for joy is to give thanks for the blessings God has given.
6. Now play several rounds of "Hungry Hungry Hippos" or "Marbles and Spoons" where the children try to gobble or pick-up as many as they can. The winner is the person who has the most balls or marbles at the end of the round.
7. Now, turn each child into a real "winner" by inviting them to share one thing for which they are thankful for each ball or marble they retrieved. Emphasize that the more thanks we give the more our "joy tanks" fill up! Play as many rounds as you can until the meal is served.
8. Memorize Together: "Giving Thanks - Fills Our Tanks"

Tree of Thankfulness

Use this Thanksgiving tradition with immediate and/or extended family as a reminder of the many blessings the Lord gives us.

1. Place a small plant or arrangement as a centerpiece for your table.
2. Cut leaf shapes out of construction paper or trace/cut everyone's hand to make a special leaf.
3. Punch a hole in the paper and run ribbon through it. Place the papers in a basket with pencils/crayons.
4. As each family member arrives for your Thanksgiving meal time together, ask them to write out what they are thankful for. Younger children can draw a picture or cut/paste something out of a magazine.
5. Before you begin eating, place each of the leaves on the centerpiece "tree."
6. During the Thanksgiving meal, take turns allowing everyone at the table to share what they wrote on their leaf.
7. Read 1 Chronicles 29:13 together: "Now therefore, our God, we thank You, and praise Your glorious name."
8. End your time together by asking the oldest person to thank God for His abundance and the many blessings He has given your family.

Added Options:

- When the meal is over, take the thankful leaves and record the items of thanks that were written down in a Thankful Journal to update each Thanksgiving and review the prior years' blessings together. Take a picture of your entire family and add it in with your notes of thankfulness and gratitude for God's many blessings.
- When you are finished, have children draw on a poster a tree trunk, grass, flowers, etc. Take the leaves and attach them. Hang the poster during the next couple of weeks to remind you of the things you are thankful for.
- Start your Thanksgiving Tree at the beginning of the month or beginning of the week before Thanksgiving. At the end of each day, have each member of the family write one thing or one person that they are thankful for.
- Have everyone trace their hands to create your Thanksgiving leaves. After everyone has written down items to be thankful for, create a Thankful Wreath to put up in your house. It will be a great reminder of all God's blessings as it hangs for all to see.

Thanksgiving Communion

The Holy Mass is a celebration of the Lord's Supper which is God's greatest gift to us, our salvation. Eucharist, the word early Christians used to describe Holy Communion means "thanksgiving." Plan to attend Mass on Thanksgiving with your family as an expression of gratitude for His sacrifice.

The Eucharist is the body, blood, soul and divinity of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. It should be received with reverence by those who are not in a state of serious sin. Receiving the Eucharist unites us to Christ, makes us sharers of his body and blood and connects us as a single body of believers — the Church.

The following activity presents an excellent teaching opportunity.

1. Secure some matzo flat bread and some grape juice. (Any kind of bread may be used but the flat bread is more demonstrative of "his body broken for us.")
2. Read the passage from Matthew 26:26-28: "While they were eating, Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, 'Take and eat; this is my body.' Then he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, saying, 'Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.'"
3. Talk about what a symbol is (i.e. wedding ring symbolizes the fact that one is married, a flag symbolizes our country, a picture of a cow is not a cow but reminds us of what a cow is like)
4. Talk about how today's matzo and wine are symbols.
5. Remind the children that during the Mass when the priest recites the Words of Institution, "Take and eat," etc., the bread and wine cease to be symbols but are changed (Transubstantiation) into the real body, blood, soul and divinity of Jesus by the power of the Holy Spirit.
6. Help the children understand that to receive the Eucharist properly 3 things are necessary. They must be free from mortal sin. They must believe in the real presence of Jesus and should receive the Eucharist with a living faith, a strong desire, humility and modesty. They should have fasted for one hour. (CCC 1385, 1386, 1387)
7. Eat the bread and drink the juice before repeating what each represents.
8. Say a prayer of Thanksgiving and attend Mass with a greater awareness and appreciation for what Christ did for us.

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