

The United Thank Offering Presents:



A November Gratitude Journey for Families



Thirty Days of Gratitude Practices to Help Families Live More Grateful Lives

Faith Formation Lessons on Gratitude for November

Welcome!

Thank you for downloading our November gratitude materials for families and this resource to ground them through your current Sunday School/Faith Formation program. What follows this introduction is a lesson to use before November starts so you can send home materials for families to use throughout the month of November, and a lesson to wrap up the 30 Days of Gratitude as Advent begins. Please note that the resources you are sending home are intended to be accessible to families regardless of religiosity. This way, families can share them with their extended families or friends and spread gratitude through their networks. With that said, the two lessons below will help ground the program in scripture and tradition. We hope that you find these materials to be useful and supportive of the amazing work you are doing. We also create similar (but different) materials for Lent. Those will be available by the end of the year at www.unitedthankoffering.com/lent. If you have ideas of other materials we could create, or ones you would like to create and share, please let us know via email at hmelton@episcopalchurch.org.

Overview of Materials

The November gratitude materials are set up in three parts:

1. An introductory lesson to be held at church (this can be done as a children's sermon or in a Sunday School/Faith Formation setting)
2. Kits for families are sent home as a part of the introductory lesson
3. A wrap-up lesson is held at church (this can be done as a children's sermon or in a Sunday School/Faith Formation setting). If everyone in your congregation is using UTO materials for November, this is also a great time to hold an Ingathering. You can find out more about holding an Ingathering here: <https://unitedthankoffering.com/ingathering/>

In addition to these materials, which can be used independently or all together, we also offer resources regarding the Thanksgiving Holiday for children and families, liturgies for Thanksgiving meals at home, and gratitude resources for Thanksgiving gatherings. All of these additional resources can be found at www.unitedthankoffering.com/November.

Preparing for November

This program was created to be very easy to implement and utilizes very little in terms of materials or labor.

You will need to print out one set of materials for each family and put them in a bag to take home.

Family Kits include:

1. Welcome letter (which you can adapt or add to with specific information regarding your church)

2. Fall leaves craft directions and a set of leaves, printed on fall-colored paper
3. A deep-dive journal.

If you are using this as a part of your faith formation program, you will need:

1. Enough leaves for each classroom so each child can use one leaf each Sunday during November when they gather (you can print these out and have someone cut them out or if you have a lot of classes, you can always buy pre-cut leaves and have one set per classroom with the prompts for the leaders to reference)
2. Trunks for trees in each classroom (see the craft page for four different versions)
3. Ways to attach the leaves

If you are using this as a part of a children's sermon, you will need:

1. Enough leaves for all parishioners to use each Sunday during November as people gather for church (you can print these out and have someone cut them out or you can always buy pre-cut leaves and let people write anything they are grateful for on them)
2. Trunk for the tree displayed in the worship area (see the craft page for three different versions)
3. Ways to attach the leaves during the Peace or Prayers of the People

That's it! The rest is written out on the following pages as you work through the program. If you run into any issues, send us an email at hmelton@episcopalchurch.org and we'll track down what you need.

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Faith Formation Opening Lesson on Gratitude for November

Scripture for Introducing the Project

Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

Note: if you are using these materials as a part of your children's sermon, feel free to adapt the discussion points below to the scripture lessons for the Sunday when you introduce it.

Discussion

Begin with defining the words from the passage that the children might need help with, along with identifying big words

that they might know. We suggest starting with what the words *ceasing* and *circumstances* mean. If working with a mixed age group, invite the older kids to rewrite the sentence in words that make the most sense to them.

Then share: now that we've turned this line from a very old letter into something we can understand, what do you think the author is trying to tell us about how we are supposed to behave?

(Let the kids answer and share their ideas.)

- I wonder if you can think of some ways that we can pray without stopping? (answers might be: be kind, think of others' feelings, share, say please and thank you, etc.)
- Does God really mean we need to say thank you all the time? What about when something bad happens?

(Note: this is really important because we don't want to teach kids to say thank you to God for hard things happening, but we do want them to know that even in really difficult times, there are people there to help or show kindness to us, that sometimes we give thanks for not being alone during the hard thing.)

- I wonder what it feels like to say thank you to ourselves?
- Do you think you can think of thirty things to say thank you for?

Now you can introduce the family kits

Today, I am giving each family one of these kits to try to practice gratitude every day from now until the end of November. Inside each kit is a craft where you get to cut out leaves and add them to a tree. But these leaves are special. Instead of falling off a tree, they get added on! Each day you'll write one thing you are grateful for that fits into the category on the other side. Some categories are nature, community, self, others, and your home. There's also a journal to use once a week to think about the areas a little more with your family. I've also printed out leaves for our whole class (church) so we can share gratitude together each week here, too! Want to help me get started?

Pass out leaves and show the kids where and how they will attach them to the tree at church.

Wrap Up

Thank you so much for being on our gratitude team. I know that when I try to do something new, it is always nice to have a group of people to try it with me. Together we're going to try to be better at saying thank you and practicing gratitude. We're going to work together to notice all of the good things that God is doing in our lives and share those with our families and here at church.

If using as a sermon during church, you can add:

The United Thank Offering is a ministry for every Episcopalian that we get to join in, and they have created these resources to help us become a more grateful community. Each Sunday, when we say the Eucharistic prayer, aka the Great Thanksgiving, it is a reminder that we are the gifts of God for the people of God, too. It's not just the bread and wine—all of us are gifts! I want to encourage you to join me (us) in this gratitude journey. UTO has booklets for adults to use as a gratitude journal or a simple calendar, and both will be available for you to pick up after church. They also have a daily text message you can sign up for that will send one message a day during November encouraging you to practice gratitude. Information on the text message service is in your bulletin. At the end of November, we're going to gather up all of this gratitude as a part of our UTO Ingathering Sunday. For over 125 years, Episcopalians have taken these UTO Blue Boxes and put money or a note into them each time something good has happened as a way of saying thank you to God. Each year the boxes are collected and all the money (100%) in all the boxes goes into grants to help people all over the world. I want us to practice gratitude every day this month and we'll collect thank offerings at the end. More information will be in the newsletters and bulletins each week.

Additional resources to further discussion

Here is a list of books for elementary aged children that UTO leaders recommend:

- *Goodness Gracious: A Gratitude Book for Children* by Kathleen A. Green
- *I am thankful: A Thanksgiving Book for Kids* by Sheri Wall
- *Thank You, Thank You, Thank You* by Melissa Peck
- *Giving Thanks: A Native American Good Morning Message* by Chief Jake Swamp
- *Giving Thanks: More Than 100 Ways to Say Thank You* by Ellen Surrey
- *The Thank You Book* by Mo Willems

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Faith Formation Follow-Up Lesson on Gratitude for November

Supplies:

1. The leaves from the classroom or congregation's gratitude tree
2. UTO Grant List - available at www.unitedthankoffering.com/grants. UTO also has a list of every grant awarded since 1883 that you can search and see if a grant was ever given in your community or for a specific thing they were thankful for. (For example, if someone was thankful for books, UTO has given numerous grants to educational programs, from Reading Camp in the Diocese of Lexington to computer labs in Palestine.).
3. Additional resource - you can have Christmas list handouts for families to pick up from www.unitedthankoffering.org/christmas

Scripture for Introducing the Project:

Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work. II Corinthians 9:7-8

Again, if using this lesson as a children's sermon, please adapt the lessons to the scriptures assigned for the day.

Discussion:

Read the scripture and begin with defining the words from the passage that the children might need help with, along with some they should know. You can ask them what each of the following words mean: *reluctantly, compulsion, abundantly, and abound*. You can also work with the kids to put the scripture verse into their own words.

Some discussion questions to use include:

- I wonder if you have ever given someone a gift or something they needed? What did it feel like? What you think it means when we talk about how our blessings can bless others. (Like when we donate gently used toys...)
- Has someone ever thanked you for helping them? I wonder how that made you feel?
- How can we say thank you to someone who connects us to God?

This past month, we have tried to spend time each day practicing gratitude. Gratitude is the good feeling we get when we notice and respond to the good things God is doing in the world around us. When we reflect and remember all the good things we've experienced, it encourages us to keep practicing gratitude.

As we look at our gratitude tree together, we will notice how many good things happened over the past month.

We're going to reflect on some of the good things that happened in November. Can you share with me the best thing that happened to you in the last month?

Wrap Up

As Christians, we believe that we are all connected and that our love for one another is a way that we show the world the love of Jesus. When we say thank you, we are noticing and acknowledging the goodness inside of another person, which is a gift from God. This past month, we've noticed a lot of good things! I think that if we look back on what we were grateful for this month, we might notice the love of God coming from others. I wonder if you think so too?

Activity

1. Take some of the leaves off of the tree, read them, and reflect on all the awesome things that they experienced in November. Celebrate memories, maybe give thanks once again for any people named and all the ways that these moments of gratitude connect them to others and to God.
2. Notice the similar things that the children have given thanks for and comment on those.
3. Pack the papers into a UTO Blue Box and thank everyone for sharing these things with you. Tell them that they will now get to put all of their gratitude into the parish ingathering. You should explain how that works so they feel confident in participating fully.

Please note:

- 100% of what is given to UTO is given away the following year in grants to support innovative mission and ministry around the globe as well as here in the United States.
- The United Thank Offering likes to thank every person who participates in UTO, so if you would like a special thank you note sent to each individual (regardless of if they gave money or not) for participating in the Thanksgiving program, please email Heather Melton at hmelton@episcopalchurch.org and she will send a batch of cards to the church for you to hand out. We do not keep this information, we only use it to thank children by name for participating.

Additional Resources to further discussion:

If you'd like to keep talking about gratitude or UTO in your home , we offer resources and support on our webpage: www.unitedthankoffering.org/formation. There you can find journal prompts, lessons for Lent, and more. We continue to add to the collection each year with the ideas that come from people like you, so do let us know if you are looking for something specific to use that you can't find. If you want to keep gratitude going into Advent, we've got a few resources for Christmas (including a Christmas list for kids) at www.unitedthankoffering.com/Christmas

Finally, thank **you** for making the world a better place by encouraging gratitude with your leadership and discussion over the past 30 days. We appreciate you!

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November 2023

Dear Families,

Thank you for your interest in cultivating gratitude within your family over the next thirty days with the United Thank Offering (UTO). We know how busy the lives of families are, so we hope that adding a quick gratitude practice each day will bring joy to your family rather than being a burden.

Each November, UTO invites people to spend thirty days intentionally practicing gratitude. We have materials for adults, including a daily text message gratitude prompt to help individuals think about the good things that are happening each day and give thanks for them. For families, we've created a process with different levels of commitment so you can choose the one that works best for you. All of the materials are included in this packet and you can choose what appeals to you. Here's what you'll find inside:

- 1. A simple set of 30 leaves, each with a gratitude prompt, that your family can use each day to notice and give thanks for something in your lives.** We've included four easy ideas of how to display your leaves as well.
- 2. A weekly "deep dive" acorn** that will help your family have a discussion about a familiar topic to help deepen gratitude in the lives of your family members. Each topic was chosen specifically with the goal of helping children engage with gratitude easily. We've even included some research behind the deep dive acorns for those who are interested.
- 3. A link to easy, downloadable Thanksgiving items, from a fill-in-the-blank thank-you card to conversation dice, and more.** We've included links to other resources you can print out and use as part of your Thanksgiving celebration which we are making available to everyone who wants to put the "thanks" back into Thanksgiving.
- 4. A link to information on Thanksgiving Day for families to consider and discuss.** We know that topics like the true history of Thanksgiving can be challenging. We've got you covered with some basic information and links to find out more for curious kids.

November is a time when many people think about gratitude in the United States. We hope you'll share some of these resources with others and encourage them to join you in intentionally practicing gratitude for thirty days. The materials provided here are meant to feel very simple, with the hope that they won't add more work to the already full schedules of families but will offer an opportunity to pause, reflect, share, and rejoice in the good things that may go overlooked amid a busy day.

We hope you will find these resources useful and life-giving. We are so very grateful that you are inviting us to be a part of your November and we hope you'll share your gratitude journey with us on social media. If you would like more ideas on how to incorporate gratitude as a regular spiritual practice for your family, our website has a wealth of resources. You can find them at www.episcopalchurch.org or you can contact us at hmelton@episcopalchurch.org for help.

Sincerely,

The UTO Board and Staff