

# A Harvest of Gratitude

## An all-age celebration



**Harvest festivals offer an opportunity to engage with your local community, including those who might not normally attend church. This 'village fête' style event includes family activities and competitions, followed by an opportunity for worship on the theme of gratitude and an optional shared meal.**

Harvest festivals are traditionally celebrated in the UK in September or October. Their roots lie in the Jewish festival of Sukkot (ingathering, Exodus 23:16), which Jesus would have celebrated. In the UK, Harvest festivals were reintroduced to the Church calendar in the nineteenth century by a Cornish clergyman, Revd Robert Hawker. Our modern lives may be separated from the practicalities of farming, but it is helpful to express gratitude for God's provision of the simplest things like food, water and all the good things in our lives.

### Beforehand

- Think about what activities you would like to run and recruit volunteers to set up, welcome people and supervise activities on the day.
- Advertise the event on local social media, put up posters in your local area and send out invitations, e.g. to local schools, playgroups, etc. Include details of start and finish times and what people should bring, e.g. vegetables or cakes for competitions; dry goods/food donations for a local food bank; veggies to be included in a community soup – such as potato, leek, onion, carrot; apples for pressing and empty bottles to fill with the fresh juice.

### Timetable for the event

- Allocate some time at the start for free-flow engagement with the various activities.
- At a designated point, gather everyone for the worship element.
- Finish by announcing the competition winners. Offer a prayer of thanks over the soup and cakes if you are sharing those at the end.

### Activities

Choose one or as many activities as volunteers and space allow

**Vegetable contest** Invite people to bring in home-grown vegetables for a contest, e.g. largest pumpkin, oddly-shaped vegetables, tastiest tomato. You may want to have separate categories for children, youth and adults.

**Dry food collection** Arrange a collection for a local food bank. Publicise a list of items they would appreciate receiving.

**Baking competition** Host a baking competition with various categories (adult, youth and children) and choose a theme (e.g. showstopper cake; autumn; allotment; eco-theme; vegan baking). Ask a few judges to rate the cakes based on taste, consistency and presentation.

**You will need:** tables to display the cakes, labels for bakers' names and allergen ingredients, scorecards, and prizes for winners.

**Apple press** Ask if an individual or local environmental group has an apple press that you could borrow (or search online). Encourage people to bring apples or pears to be pressed into juice.



### Apple bobbing

**You will need:** a large bucket/barrel of water, plenty of apples, a stopwatch (optional), towels for drying wet faces and keeping the ground slip free.

Participants try to pluck out an apple floating in the barrel of water using just their teeth (no hands). To make it more competitive, you can time how quickly one can be retrieved.

### Longest orange-peel competition

**You will need:** a stockpile of oranges/easy-peel satsumas, measuring tape, a whiteboard or flipchart to serve as a leader board. Each contestant should peel one orange, trying to create the longest unbroken peel.

**Campfire with damper bread** If you have space in your grounds and can make it safe, create a small campfire in a firepit and cook campfire bread on long sticks. <http://bit.ly/4lpwvWn>

**Potato stamp printmaking** Create pictures using potatoes cut in half and carved to create stamps (images of fruit and vegetables might be good). Dip the stamp in paint and press it to the paper to create your image.

**Pressed flower ornaments** Collect flowers and press them, adding them to salt dough. [bit.ly/3EgHVEQ](http://bit.ly/3EgHVEQ)

**Bouncy castle** Depending on space and budget, you may want to hire a bouncy castle to entertain the children and create a festival atmosphere. Ensure a risk assessment is carried out, and this activity is supervised at all times by a responsible adult.

**Community soup** Beforehand, ask people to bring vegetables suitable for a soup (e.g. potato, leek, onion and carrot). On the day, have a volunteer create a couple of large pots of soup (carrot and coriander, leek and potato) which can be heated on site and shared with everyone.



## Gather

Wind down the activities and invite everyone into your worship space

- Play a game of **Would you rather go without:** Chocolate or ice cream? Wifi or toilet roll? Coffee or Petrol? Bread or milk? Running water or electricity? Shoes or a bed?
- Explain that for some people, these choices are very real, based on local availability or poverty; for others, these may sound like ridiculous questions as we don't have to make those choices. How much do we take for granted? We have so much to be thankful for.
- Ask people to share in 2-3s something they think they could never do without, and to express their thanks (to God) for it.

### Thankful prayer

Thank you, God, for everything have given us: air to breathe; water to drink; food to eat; shelter to keep us safe and warm; families who care for us and friends who love us; all of these gifts come from you, our Creator.

Thank you for the gift of life, the world you created and how it provides us with so much. Help us to remember all your gifts, to use them wisely, and to be generous and thankful with all you have given us. **Amen.**

For the rest of this Harvest service outline, see [WEB](#).

