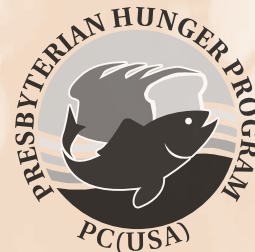


# Alternative Thanksgiving Ideas

More than any other time of the year, Thanksgiving is when we celebrate the bounty of harvest. While not a Christian holiday, the way we celebrate Thanksgiving reflects our faith commitments. Our celebrations can extend the love and fellowship of Christ beyond our dining room tables. We can enact our faith at the table by choosing foods and ingredients that honor the people that produce them as well as God's creation. We can engage in Christian hospitality by welcoming strangers and providing for those in need. We can simplify and be mindful of the spirit of thanksgiving by relaxing, praying, playing and spending time with those we love. With a spirit of celebration for the breadth of God's goodness, we have compiled this guide to living faithfully throughout the Thanksgiving season.



[pcusa.org/justliving](http://pcusa.org/justliving)

## Preparing Sustainably

Throughout creation native foods vary from region to region. We are reminded by the story of the tower of Babel (Genesis 11:1–9) that God’s intent for our world is diversity. Cherish the beauty and blessings of foods grown locally by incorporating them into Thanksgiving meals. Local foods require less energy to transport, minimize environmental impacts, are fresher, reflect seasonal flavors and ensure food sovereignty—the ability of communities to produce food for themselves.

**Main Course Selections:** If possible, hunt rather than purchase your main course. If purchasing, select locally raised turkey or game. Heritage breeds are not genetically modified, organic meats are free from pesticides, and free-range animals have lived outside. Select the option that best fits your needs.

**Regional Fare:** Encourage visitors from out of town to bring a regional item to share. Challenge guests to create side dishes containing ingredients that come from within a 100-mile radius of their homes. This will help diversify your Thanksgiving table and reflect regional foods. Find local vegetables, fruits, and herbs by perusing farmers’ markets. As an added benefit your foods will be fresher and likely more flavorful.

**Vegetarian Options:** Eating lower on the food chain and decreasing the amount of meat you eat have significant environmental benefits. Raising livestock requires significantly more resources (in grain, water and fuel) than growing the grain, fruit, and vegetable staples of a vegetarian diet.

**Select Organic Foods:** Organic foods are made without pesticides, hormones and other potentially harmful chemicals. Buying organic helps prevent such chemicals from polluting water systems, soil and air. Organic farming reduces farmworkers’ and consumers’ exposure to potentially harmful chemicals.

**Buy Fair Trade:** God calls us to do justice. Fair trade products ensure tangible income for farmers and producers around the world; they also meet certain environmental standards. As you prepare for Thanksgiving, consider increasing the number of Fair Trade Certified products you use. The Presbyterian Coffee Project offers fair trade coffees, teas, cocoas, chocolates and snacks to complement your Thanksgiving spread: [www.pcusa.org/coffee](http://www.pcusa.org/coffee). Find other fair trade items, including sugar, vanilla, spices, produce and flowers, by searching [www.wfto.org](http://www.wfto.org) for products and locations. Encourage your local grocery store to stock Fair Trade Certified items if it does not already do so.

**Fair Trade Table Spread:** Many Fair Trade organizations offer pottery, decorations, and linens that can be used in decorating a table and in serving a meal. PC(USA) Global Marketplace partners offer both practical and decorative items from cooperatives around the world, [www.pcusa.org/globalmarketplace](http://www.pcusa.org/globalmarketplace). If your church has a mission partnership with a country, celebrate it by decorating with fair trade products from that country.

## Share the Work and Savor the Day

Celebrate with the gift of service by encouraging everyone to help with preparation. Embrace the gifts and talents of people around the table and share the work associated with the meal. Create times of fellowship around meal preparation and service.

**Simplify:** Decide as a family how you want to celebrate Thanksgiving. What traditions are important to everyone? Which are essential? Consider letting go of unessential things to make room for more family time. Make simple dishes. Cook from scratch as much as possible (avoiding highly processed foods) and make preparing the meal a fun activity for the whole family.

**Establish a Family Kitchen:** If one person tends to do most of the cooking, cleaning or preparation, consider giving that person a break this year. Offer to help or share tasks. Invite guests to share stories and memories during meal preparation. Sharing the work builds community and diminishes the pressure on any one individual, creating a sustainable and enjoyable experience for all.

**Enjoy Slow Food:** Enjoy each bite and encourage others to eat slowly. Let your palette discern the flavors of the ingredients. Take time to share Thanksgiving memories and allow each person to explain what he or she is thankful for. Savoring the meal is not only enjoyable; it also honors all of the work that was put into preparing the meal and lessens the tendency to overeat.

## Serve Someone and Share the Wealth

Thanksgiving is a celebration feast, but not everyone is able to partake in such a meal. Some do not have the money or resources, family or friends, or a place to call home. We can work together to eliminate the causes of hunger. If we love our neighbor as ourselves, we will share our food and resources so those who hunger will be fed.

**Volunteer and Donate:** Take up a collection at your meal to support local efforts to alleviate hunger, or have your guests bring nonperishable items to donate to a local food pantry. Serve someone outside of your family by volunteering for a

Thanksgiving meal at a local shelter. Invite new guests to your home and engage in the ministry of hospitality.

**Advocate for Others:** Advocate for fair labor laws, adequate compensation, food sovereignty, and trade justice as one way to live God's call to justice. Consider a letter-writing campaign or initiative for your guests to support. Systems of power can be used to benefit the most vulnerable and ensure equal care and opportunity for all. Let your voting and public voice reflect your commitment to Christ by advocating for the needs of others: [www.pcusa.org/washington](http://www.pcusa.org/washington).

**Retell the Stories:** You may also serve others by teaching about the legacy of oppression associated with Thanksgiving; for many, it symbolizes great loss rather than great sharing. The PC(USA) Native American Congregational Enhancement office provides "A Historical Survey of the Last Three Centuries" at [www.pcusa.org/nativeamerican](http://www.pcusa.org/nativeamerican).

## Pray and Renew

In prayer we connect with God. We share our concerns, offer thanks, seek grace, and listen for God's call. Analyze your traditions surrounding prayers and blessings. Talk about prayer with your friends and family. Invite others to write prayers for the Thanksgiving meal. There are a number of ways to pray, so find the prayers that fit best with your celebration.

**Celebrate Diversity:** God's world is wonderfully diverse. If your guests speak multiple languages, pray in each language. Often Thanksgiving is a time when people of different denominations and faith traditions share a table together. If this is the case, invite people to offer prayers from their traditions.

**Give Thanks:** We receive the food we eat by the grace of God. Give thanks for the miracles of life and food production that make Thanksgiving feasts possible. Incorporate prayers for farmers and the earth into all your family's celebrations and remember the work of all who helped make your meals possible. If one person traditionally offers the prayer, perhaps others can join in for communal prayer, or you can rotate the tradition around from person to person, year to year.

**Think Ahead:** One way of ensuring future bounty is discussing ways of renewing the earth and supporting sustainable farming practices. Now is the time to begin discussions with loved ones regarding how you want to celebrate Christmas. Discuss priorities for each individual and agree on appropriate limits for spending and consumption.

## Looking to Advent and Christmas

As Christmas approaches we face many choices regarding shopping, schedules and more. In addition to consumer dilemmas we are faced with spiritual dilemmas. On one hand we want to observe Advent and wait for the Christ child; on the other we want to shop and wrap and bake and run ourselves ragged with all the trimmings. The day after Thanksgiving is the biggest day of the shopping season. This year, consider a different approach.

**Stay Home:** God calls us to abundant life, but this does not mean a wasteful and exuberant life. Rather, the call to abundance is one for all people. God's vision is one in which every person has enough in order to live and thrive and creation is cared for. Our consumptive lifestyles have created an unsustainable world. This year, enjoy the extended holiday weekend relaxing at home.

**Buy Nothing:** Door-buster deals may seem cheap, but they come at a high cost. Taking advantage of these sales means enduring traffic, long lines and otherwise avoidable stress. Store employees bear these costs as well. Factory workers producing these items often work under sweatshop conditions. Learn more by watching "The Story of Stuff" at [www.storyofstuff.com](http://www.storyofstuff.com) and how to change your Christmas celebration [www.buynothingchristmas.org](http://www.buynothingchristmas.org).

**Create a Gift Registry:** Use your wish list to encourage responsible shopping this holiday season. Ask friends and family for donations to non-profits, Fair Trade products and other gifts that promote sustainability and reduce consumerism with the Alternative Gift Registry at [www.alternativegiftregistry.org](http://www.alternativegiftregistry.org).



## Resources for Further Study

We hope the information in this guide will assist you this Thanksgiving. There are many more resources that can assist as we strive to live responsibly in the world. As our world is ever changing, it is important to utilize a variety of resources to inform our understanding of God's world. Below is a list of resources that provide excellent information for further study and reflection.

- **Just Living:** Access companion materials to *Alternative Thanksgiving* Ideas. Join the Enough for Everyone network and explore how individuals, couples and families can practice faith in daily life. [www.pcusa.org/justliving](http://www.pcusa.org/justliving)
- **Explorations in Just Living:** The Enough for Everyone blog is dedicated to exploring lifestyle integrity. We invite you to share in this lifelong journey with us. [www.pcusa.org/blogs/just-living](http://www.pcusa.org/blogs/just-living)
- **PC(USA) Policy:** Denominational policies that guide and shape the ministry of Enough for Everyone can be found online at [www.pcusa.org/enough](http://www.pcusa.org/enough).
- **Sustainable Table:** Information on how to select a locally raised turkey. Other local foods may also be found at [www.sustainabletable.org](http://www.sustainabletable.org).
- **Local Harvest:** Search by zip code to find markets and farms in your area: [www.localharvest.org](http://www.localharvest.org). And check out 100-mile Thanksgiving for some local and organic recommendations: <http://100milediet.org/thanksgiving>.
- **The Presbyterian Washington Office:** This office offers a number of means to engage in campaigns to change national policies. Let your voting and public voice reflect your commitment to Christ by advocating for the needs of others. [www.pcusa.org/washington](http://www.pcusa.org/washington)

- **Global Marketplace:** Enough for Everyone partners with several fair trade organizations including SERRV and Ten Thousand Villages to bring fair trade goods to PC(USA) gatherings and into your home. For more information and to order visit [www.pcusa.org/globalmarketplace](http://www.pcusa.org/globalmarketplace).

## Enough for Everyone

Our scripture and tradition call us to care for the natural world so that all may live abundantly. God cares deeply for all of creation and seeks to preserve the diversity of life. The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) seeks to live in accord with the call to economic and environmental justice, and the Presbyterian Hunger Program aims to assist individuals in living a just life that honors God.

At the heart of the Presbyterian Hunger Program is a deep concern for global economic justice and a commitment to live out our faith in Jesus Christ with integrity. We are called by God in Christ to bring good news and to proclaim release to those held captive by structures of injustice. Living as global disciples means evaluating our lifestyle choices. Adopting changes for individual and congregational lifestyle integrity witnesses to our faith and God's creation.

Join us for a Fair Trade Delegation to visit the producers behind our fair trade gifts and products. Visit [www.pcusa.org/delegations](http://www.pcusa.org/delegations) for more information on upcoming opportunities.

Just Living is produced by the Presbyterian Hunger Program. Your financial support enables PHP to witness to the healing love of Christ and to bring hope to communities and individuals struggling with hunger. Give online at [www.pcusa.org/give/hunger](http://www.pcusa.org/give/hunger). Or mail your check, made out to PC(USA) with "H999999 Hunger" on the memo line, to PC(USA), Box 643700, Pittsburgh PA 15264- 3700. Thank you!

Download this resource at [www.pcusa.org/justliving](http://www.pcusa.org/justliving). Or order by calling Presbyterian Distribution Service at (800) 524-2612 and request PDS #25432-08-372.



Presbyterian Hunger Program  
100 Witherspoon Street  
Louisville KY 40202-1396  
800-728-7228 x5626 and x5553  
[enough@pcusa.org](mailto:enough@pcusa.org)  
[www.pcusa.org/enough](http://www.pcusa.org/enough)

Revised January 2015