

Freedom's Feast THANKSGIVING

resources to get the most out of your THANKSGIVING celebration.

For 25 years, Trinity United Methodist Church, Westminster Presbyterian Church and Agudas Achim Congregation in Alexandria, VA, have held an interfaith service on the eve of Thanksgiving. Mostly, the host congregation adapts its own worship format to include other members of the faith community. In November 2002, we ([Agudas Achim Congregation](#)) adapted "Freedom's Feast" for communal worship. You will note some references to specific individuals and local circumstances that can be changed easily. We also included a Biblical reading, selected by the pastor who delivered the sermon, and a Hebrew text chanted by the cantor. (Many years, there is also a choral setting presented by a joint choir.) The evening was a wonderful success – there is very little more thrilling than to hear many voices together recite, "We the people of the United States..." [Rabbi Jack Moline](#) is rabbi of Agudas Achim Congregation in Alexandria, VA and past president of the Alexandria Interfaith Association.



RABBI JACK MOLINE

A Thanksgiving Ceremony for Interfaith Gatherings

Reader Welcome to our Thanksgiving Service! We gather together to ask the Lord's blessing on us, on our community and on our country. These past two years have made us especially conscious of all the reasons to be grateful. Tonight, we remind ourselves of the foundations of our gratitude and of the many hands and hearts that have fulfilled God's will to keep us in life, sustain us and enable us to reach this moment.

Reader You are invited to be a participant in this service. If you would like to take a turn or two as "reader," please come to any one of the pulpits when the spirit moves you. If not, we will gladly be your guides.

Reader This service is adapted from a new ceremony for Thanksgiving entitled "Freedoms Feast." If you would like to use it at your table, you may find it by accessing the web site printed at the end of this ceremony.

Together, we sing:

AMERICA THE BEAUTIFUL

*O beautiful for spacious skies,
For amber waves of grain,
For purple mountain majesties
Above the fruited plain!
America! America!
God shed his grace on thee
And crown thy good
With brotherhood
From sea to shining sea!*

Reader Tomorrow Americans all over the country will gather for a holiday that has grown over nearly 400 years to become the most widely observed celebration in national life. Why do we give thanks as Americans? Why do we give thanks at all?

Reader One of the first things we learn as children is how and when to say thank you. We give thanks because we've been blessed with something that we need or want.

Reader Let's take a few moments to give thanks for something we've been blessed with in the past year.

Leader asks people to share one thing—in one sentence or less—for which they are grateful.

ALL For these things and more, we are thankful. May we always treasure our blessings and be able to share our gratitude with others.

Prayers of thanksgiving from each of the faith communities.

Reader The bonds of blood and friendship that tie us together run deep. In this room are the people we cherish and love as family, friends and neighbors, as children of God.

Reader But today we also celebrate another bond: the bond of citizenship. The birth of the United States was based on a bold idea. No more would blood, ethnic background, religion or race define a nation. Our founders dreamed of a people united through common devotion to shared ideals.

Reader They wanted to create a country and a people committed to individual freedom, tolerance, and equal opportunity. And in the process, a new nation would be born: We the people, united to make one great new country.

Reader At this time of harvest and Thanksgiving we reflect on the ways in which our nation has been enriched by its many peoples. We have not always treated all of our people justly. But because we are a nation bound at our founding by the ideal that all of us are created equal, we strive to do that which is just and good.

THE ORIGINAL AMERICANS

Reader We remember and honor the oldest Americans. They are like the oak tree, long-lived and deep-rooted. For thousands of years before white men came to these shores, our native American peoples lived off the land. They hunted, farmed and developed a rich culture with a wide range of languages, customs and governments. They shared their knowledge and helped to open the continent for others, but in the process their people were uprooted; many died from disease and war, and much of their rich culture was lost.

We take a moment to reflect on the Native American nations that preceded our American nation.

ABENAKI
ACCOHANNOCK
ALABAMA-COUSHATTA
ALASKA NATIVES
ALGONQUIAN
APACHE
ARAPAHO
ARIKARA
ASSINIBOINE
ASSINIBOINE SIOUX
ATHABASKAN

BLACKFEET
CADDO
CARRIER
CATAWBA
CAYUGA
CHEROKEE
CHEYENNE
CHICKASAW
CHIPPEWA
CHIPPEWA CREE
CHITIMACHA

CHOCTAW
CHUMASH
COHARIE
COMANCHE
COSTANOAN
COWLITZ
CREE
CREEK
CROW
DAKOTA
DELAWARE

DENE
ESSELEN
FLATHEAD
GITANYOW
GOSHUTE
GROS VENTRE
GWITCH'IN
HAIDA
HALIWA-SAPONI
HAWAIIAN NATIVES
HIDATSA
HO CHUNK
HOHOKAM
HOPI
HOUMA
HUPA
HURON
ILLINOIS
INNU
INUIT
INUPIAQ/INUPIAT
IOWA
IROQUOIS
KALISPEL
KAW
KIOWA
KLALLAM
KLAMATH
KOOTENAI
KUMEYAAY
LAKOTA
LUMBEE
MAKAH
MANDAN
MATTAPONI
MEHERRIN

MELUNGEON
MENOMINEE
METIS
MIAMI
MINGO
MISSION INDIANS
MIWOK
MOHAWK
MOHEGAN
MOHICAN
MONACAN
MONTAUKETTS
NANSEMOND
NAVAJO/DINE
NEZ PERCE
NISGA'A
NOOTKA
OHLONE
OJIBWE/CHIPPEWA
OMAHA
ONEIDA
ONONDAGA
OSAGE
OTTAWA
PAIUTE
PAMUNKEY
PASSAMAQUODDY
PAWNEE
PENOBSCOT
PEORIA
PEQUOT
PIMA
POMO
POTAWATOMI
POWHATAN
PUEBLO

QUAPAW
QUINULT
SAC AND FOX
SALISH
SAPONI
SEMINOLE
SENECA
SHAWNEE
SHINNECOCK
SHOSHONE
SHUSWAP
SILETZ
SIOUX
SPOKANE
SUQUAMISH
SWINOMISH
TAINO
TLINGIT
TONKAWA
TUSCARORA
UMATILLA
UMPQUA
UTE
WABANAKI
WACCAMAW
WAMPANOAG
WARM SPRINGS INDIANS
WASHOE
WICHITA
WINNEBAGO
WIYOT
WYANDOT
YOKUTS
YUP'IK
YUROK

FROM PLYMOUTH ROCK: "GOD FAVORS OUR UNDERTAKING"

Together, we sing:

AMERICA THE BEAUTIFUL

*O beautiful for pilgrim feet
Whose stern impassioned stress
A thoroughfare for freedom beat
Across the wilderness!
America! America!
God mend thine every flaw,
Confirm thy soul In self-control,
Thy liberty in law!*

Reader Our story as a nation begins with the arrival of the Pilgrims at Plymouth Rock in 1620. Now listen to the Telling of The Pilgrim Story in the words of William Bradford, the second governor of Plymouth Plantation.

ALL Departing.

Reader The time having come when they must depart...they left that good and pleasant city, which had been their resting place for nearly twelve years; but they knew they were pilgrims, and lifted up their eyes to the heavens, their dearest country, and quieted their spirits.

ALL Landing.

Reader Being brought safely in sight of land, they fell upon their knees and blessed the God of Heaven who had brought them over the vast and furious ocean...they now had no...houses—much less towns—to repair to...it was winter...sharp and severe, and subject to fierce storms...

ALL Surviving.

Reader Squanto stayed with them, and was their interpreter, and became a special instrument sent of God for their good, beyond their expectation. He showed them how to plant their corn, where to take fish and other commodities, and guided them to unknown places, and never left them till he died...

ALL Thanking.

Reader Ought not the children of their fathers rightly to say: Our fathers were Englishmen who came over the great ocean, and were ready to perish in this wilderness; but they cried unto the Lord, and He heard their voice, and looked on their adversity....

ON THE WAY TO NATIONHOOD

Together we sing:

MY COUNTRY 'TIS OF THEE

*My country 'tis of thee,
Sweet land of liberty
Of thee I sing:
Land where my fathers died,
Land of the Pilgrims' pride,
From every mountainside
Let freedom ring!*

Reader Our ancestors arrived at Plymouth Rock in 1620. Without the native Americans who taught them to cultivate corn and other native crops, the Pilgrims would not have survived. This corn they ate at their first harvest meal together. Together they worked without regard for color or creed. Today we are a nation of many million. Our colors far exceed the number of colors the Pilgrims and Native Americans could have imagined.

THE AMERICAN DREAM

Together we sing:

THIS LAND IS YOUR LAND

*This land is your land,
this land is my land*

*From California
to the New York Island
From the Redwood Forest
to the Gulf Stream Water
This land was made for you and me.*

Reader Waves of immigrants from England followed the Pilgrims. Many came for religious freedom. Some came in search of economic opportunities. Others were drawn by a sense of adventure.

Reader As the immigrants settled, each colony developed a special character. **Strict Puritans** lived in Massachusetts while Catholics sought asylum in Maryland and religious dissenters of all kinds ended up in Rhode Island and Pennsylvania. New York (then New Amsterdam) and Virginia were filled with adventurers seeking their fortunes.

Reader At the same time, a new type of citizen was emerging. Freed from Europe's rigid class system, he was independent, hard-working, well-schooled, multi-talented and adventurous. Most importantly, he believed that his success depended on his own merit.

Reader **Benjamin Franklin**, an example of this new citizen, was one of our oldest Founding Fathers and one of America's earliest self-made men.

Reader From *Poor Richard's Almanack*, by Ben Franklin: *Reader*: Eat to live, and not live to eat. *Reader*: He that lies down with Dogs, shall rise up with fleas. *Reader*: Fish and visitors stink in 3 days.

Reader Hear no ill of a Friend, nor speak any of an Enemy.

Reader Little strokes fell great oaks

Reader No pains, no gains.

Reader Keep your eyes wide open before marriage, half shut afterwards.

Reader God helps them that help themselves.

Reader Early to bed and early to rise, makes a man healthy, wealthy and wise.

Reader Franklin's witty sayings teach hard work, discipline and self reliance -- essential traits for a people who want to be independent and free.

Reader In 1765, the British Parliament passed the **Stamp Act**, the first tax imposed on the colonies without their consent. The colonists boycotted British goods until the tax was repealed. This protest helped to set the stage for the Revolutionary War.

Reader On December 16, 1773, colonists disguised as Indians boarded three ships in Boston Harbor and dumped their cargo of tea overboard to protest a British-imposed tax on tea. This was called the Boston Tea Party.

Reader In September of 1774, the First Continental Congress voted to impose a boycott on all British goods.

Reader The British responded by sending British troops to Massachusetts to arrest the colonial leaders and seize their ammunition.

Reader However, **Paul Revere** warned the colonial soldiers, or "Minutemen," as they became known, that the British were on their way. On April 19, 1775, fighting broke out at Lexington and Concord.

Reader The Shot Heard Round the World, when Americans first fired on the British, announced the beginning of the American Revolutionary War.

Together we sing:

MY COUNTRY 'TIS OF THEE

*My native country thee,
Land of the noble free,
Thy name I love:
I love thy rocks and rills,
Thy woods and templed hills;
My heart with rapture thrills
Like that above.*

Reader We remember and honor the bravery of American colonists who joined the revolution and all Americans who have ever fought to protect our freedoms. Small in number and ill-equipped, the colonists faced the most powerful nation in the world. They risked their lives, homes and families for the right to determine their own destiny.

Together we sing:

AMERICA THE BEAUTIFUL

*O beautiful for heroes proved
In liberating strife.
Who more than self their country loved
And mercy more than life!
America! America!
May God thy gold refine
Till all success
Be nobleness
And every gain divine!*

Reader The Declaration of Independence is the document that **Thomas Jefferson** wrote and our Founding Fathers signed on July 4, 1776 to declare a new nation that embraced freedom and justice for all.

THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE

ALL When in the Course of human events,

Reader it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another

Reader and to assume among the powers of the earth, *Reader*: the separate and equal station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God entitle them,

Reader a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation.

ALL We hold these truths to be self-evident

Reader that all men are created equal

Reader that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights

Reader that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.

Reader That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed...

Reader it is the Right of the People to... institute new Government...

Reader And for the support of this Declaration

Reader with a firm reliance on the protection of divine Providence

ALL we mutually pledge to each other our Lives, our Fortunes and our sacred Honor.

Together we sing:

MY COUNTRY 'TIS OF THEE

Let music swell the breeze,

And ring from all the trees

Sweet freedom's song:

Let mortal tongues awake:

Let all that breathe partake;

Let rocks their silence break,

The sound prolong.

Reader We honor and remember the many peoples who have come to these shores. For nearly 400 years, America has been the land of dreams for oppressed people everywhere. They came from every continent, from every land. Your family came to our country from distant shores. Call out the name of the place from which your forebears arrived...

They have made innumerable contributions to our culture and our economy. They became our railroad workers and our miners, our fishermen, lumberjacks and lawyers, our shipbuilders, entertainers, factory workers, our doctors, inventors and shop owners, our ranchers, our farmers, and ourselves.

Together, we sing:

AMERICA THE BEAUTIFUL

*O beautiful for patriot dream
That sees beyond the years
Thine alabaster cities gleam
Undimmed by human tears!
America! America!
God shed His grace on thee
And crown thy good
With brotherhood
From sea to shining sea!*

THE CONSTITUTION

Reader It is one thing to declare a new nation, quite another to govern it. The foundation for governing our country is laid down in the Constitution. It is a compact: a binding agreement between the people and those whom we elect to lead us. It guarantees that we will live in a society ruled by the laws that we create through our elected representatives.

Reader It distributes the powers of government across three branches: the legislative, executive, and judiciary. The system is designed with checks and balances to ensure that all voices are heard in national debate and to prevent any one branch of government from having too much power.

ALL We the People of the United States

Reader in Order to form a more perfect Union

Reader establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defense

Reader promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity

ALL do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.

Reader Article I establishes the legislative branch of government, called the Congress and comprised of the Senate and the House of Representatives. Congress creates the laws that rule our country.

Reader Article II establishes the executive branch comprised of the President and Vice President of the United States and the cabinet departments. The President must sign or veto the laws the Congress passes and is the chief commanding officer of the country's armed forces. The President, Vice President and cabinet make sure that the laws Congress passes are implemented.

Reader Article III establishes the judiciary branch, or the court system, which sets the Supreme Court as the highest court in the land. The judiciary branch decides whether laws are constitutional and guarantees due process and justice for all when laws have been broken.

Reader Article IV requires that states respect the laws of other states as long as they do not violate laws of the nation.

Reader Article V allows amendments to the Constitution provided that two-thirds of the members of Congress favor the change. But the people have the final say. Through elected representatives, a majority of the states must approve an amendment in order to add it permanently to the Constitution.

Reader Article VI guarantees that the United States of America will honor all the debts and treaties assumed by the old colonial confederacy.

Reader Article VII makes the Constitution the law of the land upon ratification by nine state conventions.

Reader After nine months of fierce public debate, the Constitution, passed by the First Continental Congress, was finally ratified by nine states on July 21, 1789. The legislators who voted for the Constitution understood that it did not sufficiently protect individual rights, so they applied the rules of the system they had created and used Article V to develop the Bill of Rights.

Together we sing:

MY COUNTRY 'TIS OF THEE

Our father's God,

to Thee,

Author of Liberty,

To Thee we sing:

Long may our land be bright

With freedom's holy light;

Protect us by

Thy might, Great God, our King!

Reader This is the Bill of Rights, consisting of 10 amendments to the Constitution, which the Second Continental Congress passed on December 15, 1791.

Reader Amendment I separates church and state, guarantees freedom of religion, of conscience, of speech, and of the press, and protects the right of the people to peaceably assemble and petition the government with grievances.

Reader Amendment II establishes the right of the people to keep and bear Arms. *Reader:* Amendment III requires the homeowner's consent to house soldiers during peacetime and calls for special laws to change this requirement during war.

Reader Amendment IV protects the people against unreasonable searches and seizures by requiring a court-ordered warrant in advance.

Reader Amendment V prevents anyone from being jailed for a capital crime without the approval of a Grand Jury, except for those serving in the military "in time of War or public danger." No person can be tried twice for the same offence or be required to testify against himself in a court of law. No person can be deprived of life, liberty or property without due process of law.

Reader Amendment VI guarantees that in all criminal cases the accused has the right to: a speedy and public trial by an impartial jury; to be informed of the charges against him; to confront the witnesses against him; and to have legal Counsel for his defense.

Reader Amendment VII guarantees the right to a trial by jury.

Reader Amendment VIII prohibits excessive bail, excessive fines, or "cruel and unusual punishments."

Reader Amendment IX ensures that the rights of the people defined in the Constitution do not limit other rights of the people not included in the document.

Reader Amendment X gives all powers not expressly given to the United States, or prohibited to the States by the Constitution, to the States or to the people.

Reader We honor and remember those who came to this land against their will. Torn from their homeland and their families, African slaves helped to lay the foundations of this country. Slavery traps the human soul, shutting out light and possibility. Only when the soul is freed can it fulfill its true purpose. And only when the body that contains that soul is freed can we, the people, fulfill our true purpose. From slavery came a people who have enriched our nation with their many gifts.

GRACE AND GRATITUDE

Reader Psalm 116 I love that the Lord should hear my voice and my supplications. Because He has inclined his ear to me, Therefore will I call upon Him all my days.

Reader The cords of death encompassed, and the straits of She'ol got hold of me; I found trouble and sorrow. But I called upon the name of the Lord: "I beseech You, o Lord, deliver my soul!"

Reader Gracious is the Lord and righteous; yea, our God is compassionate. The Lord preserves the simple; I was brought low, and He saved me. Return, o my soul, unto your rest, for the Lord has dealt bountifully with you. For You have delivered my soul from death, My eyes from tears, And my feet from stumbling. I shall walk before the Lord in the lands of the living.

Reader I trusted, even when I said, "I am greatly afflicted." I said in my haste, "All men are liars!"

Reader How can I repay the Lord all His bountiful dealings toward me? I will lift up the cup of salvation and call upon the name of the Lord. My vows will I pay unto the Lord, yea, in the presence of all His people.

Reader Grievous in the sight of the Lord is the death of His righteous. I beseech You, o Lord, for I am Your servant, Your servant, the son of your handmaid; You have loosed my bands.

Reader I will offer to You the sacrifice of Thanksgiving and will call upon the name of the Lord, Yea, in the presence of all His people, in the courts of the Lord's house, In the midst of you, o Jerusalem.

ALL Hallelujah!

OUR GIFT

We rise

ALL I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America and to the republic for which it stands, one nation, under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

Reader But we do have injustice in our midst. We understand that poverty, homelessness, poor health, or joblessness can rob a person of his dignity.

Reader As Americans, we know that money alone cannot solve these problems, but it can make a difference. Americans give money to correct injustice because we know that in a democracy we all have a stake in one another.

Reader Let us reach into our pockets and make an offering to those in need. Tonight, we support pastoral care for those in Inova Alexandria Hospital. But our obligations to those who do not enjoy liberty and justice do not end with this offering.

Together we sing:

IF I HAD A HAMMER

L. Hays and P. Seeger

*If I had a hammer,
I'd hammer in the morning
I'd hammer in the evening, All over this land.
I'd hammer out danger,
I'd hammer out a warning,
I'd hammer out love between my brothers and my sisters,
All over this land.
If I had a bell,
I'd ring it in the morning
I'd ring it in the evening, All over this land.
I'd ring out danger, I'd ring out a warning,
I'd ring out love between my brothers and my sisters, All over this land.
If I had a song, I'd sing it in the morning
I'd sing it in the evening, All over this land.
I'd sing out danger, I'd sing out a warning,
I'd sing out love between my brothers and my sisters, All over this land.
Well I got a hammer,
And I got a bell, And I got a song to sing, all over this land.
It's the hammer of Justice,
It's the bell of Freedom, It's the song about Love between my brothers and my sisters,
All over this land.*

We are seated.

FREEDOM & AMERICAN CREATIVITY

Leader Freedom is such a powerful force; once unleashed, it can easily become uncontrollable. In America we believe that freedom must be balanced by responsibility. Our freedoms and responsibilities are laid out in the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution and the Bill of Rights.

Reader When we know that our government's power depends on our consent and when we are sure that our rights are protected, we can spend our time and energy differently from those who are fighting persecution and oppression.

Reader We give thanks that those gathered here today had the freedom to travel here without permits or any other government interference.

Reader We give thanks that we can say what we want to say, without looking over our shoulders or worrying that we are being reported.

Reader We give thanks that we can vote for someone to represent us so that we can all have a voice in America.

Reader Let's end by giving thanks for the joyful noise of freedom: the noise that a free nation can make. This is what we can do when we are free. This is what we can be.

Reader We thank the inventors.

Reader We thank the soldiers and sailors.

Reader We thank the entrepreneurs.

Reader We thank the journalists.

Reader We thank the government workers.

Reader We thank the singers.

Reader We thank the artists.

Reader We thank the dancers.

Reader We thank the musicians and composers.

Reader We thank the writers.

Reader We thank the statesmen and politicians.

Reader We thank the police, fire and rescue workers.

Reader We thank the explorers.

Reader We thank the activists.

Reader We thank the scientists.

Reader We thank the athletes.

Reader We thank the teachers.

Reader We thank the attorneys.

Reader We thank the health care providers.

Reader We thank the humanitarians.

Reader We thank the philanthropists.

ALL We thank God: for keeping us alive, sustaining us and enabling us to reach this moment together!

Together we sing:

GOD BLESS AMERICA

by Irving Berlin

*God bless America Land that I love!
Stand beside her And guide her
Through the night with a light from above.
From the mountains,
To the prairies,
To the oceans,
White with foam,
God bless America, My home sweet home!
God bless America, My home sweet home!*