



On your marks

Although not strictly one of the great feasts of the Church, Harvest Thanksgiving is nevertheless a widely recognised occasion for the Christian Church to celebrate God's goodness to us all. Even in today's pre-packaged and refrigerated world of food products, there is still a residual awareness of how much we depend on the fruits of the earth for our survival. Harvest Thanksgiving is an opportunity to remind ourselves, and to invite others to recognise, that:

- this is God's world
- he has given us more than enough for our need (although not of course for our greed)
- God loves to give us good things as a sign of the unfailing love he offers to every one of us.

Get set

Harvest services and harvest suppers are among the most attended and popular church events of the Christian year. What follows are some suggestions for all-age activities that could be part of this church family celebration.

Bible link: Deuteronomy 26:1-11

Go!

1. The promise of a regular harvest is first given by God to Noah following the flood and is sealed by the sign of the rainbow (see Genesis 8:21-22 and 9:8-13).

Use the colours of the rainbow as names for mixed-age team groups and challenge each team to:

- find as many objects of their colour as they can in the room/church/hall
 - list as many items of food and drink with their colour as they can think of
 - create a collage of items in their colour cut out from a pile of magazines
 - use the letters of their colour word to make up an acrostic that gives thanks to God for the variety in this world
 - work together to spell out the letters of their colour in body shapes made from the people in the team.
2. Build on the fact that everyone belongs to different colour teams to introduce some simple warm-up activities such as:
 - Call out various actions, which particular colour teams should attempt - for example, jumping up as high as possible, running to one wall and back, doing star jumps, hopping, skipping or running on the spot.
 - Mix up the colours by inviting everyone to pair up in particular combinations and then in twos to touch knees, heads, elbows, fingertips, and so on.
 - Finally, ask them to arrange themselves in groups with a variety of rainbow colours and make

joined-up pieces of sculpture – such as an arch, a tiny ball, a huge star shape on the ground or various forms of a circle – in which everyone is linked by their feet, their elbows or at their shoulders.

3. You might like to use the following chant to mark the transition from one activity to another. Start this by asking everyone to join in with some rhythmic clapping and then to echo back to you as leader the following simple rhyme, line by line:

*Let's celebrate the harvest
Of water, field and tree.
Rejoice how God has given all
With love to you and me.*

4. Gather everyone in a circle and go around giving each person one of the following words linked to corn – seed, stalk, sheaf. Play a 'fruit salad' type of game, calling out one of these words, at which point the people whose word it is should quickly cross the circle to the other side. Practise this and then ask for some volunteers to be in the middle. This time when you call out the word, the volunteers need to move and find a place back in the circle, stranding others in the middle. If you want everyone to move, call out the word 'harvest'.
5. Play a game of charades, in which one person or perhaps a whole team has to mime eating a particular fruit. Can the others guess which fruit it is? Repeat this with popular snacks, chocolates, sweets, main meals and desserts.
6. Play a 'statues' type of game, calling out one of the following key words which are linked to particular actions. Begin with everyone walking around randomly and then, as soon as they hear the key word, they must adopt the pose that they have been shown. For example:
 - Flowerpot – everyone stands together with arms held high in a tight squeeze
 - Cornfield – everyone should stand in a filled-in square formation
 - Orchard – everyone should space out and stand with their hands in the air like the branches of a tree
 - Vineyard – everyone should get on their knees on the floor, holding out their hands wide to either side and linking up with each other
 - Windfalls – everyone should curl up in small lumps on the floor
7. Invite everyone to stand in four rows, one behind the other. Then, ask them all to turn and face in the same direction putting their arms on each other's shoulders, creating four lines of joined people. Next, practise a manoeuvre that involves everyone turning through 90 degrees to face the same direction and stretching out their arms to link-up – a move from vertical lines to horizontal lines. Once they have mastered these moves, choose one person to be a runner and one to be a chaser. Separate these two people out among the lines as far apart as possible and then set them running. They can go up and down and around the ends of the lines but not wander off. The chase must only happen between the lines. Every now and then, call out 'turn' – so the vertical lines become horizontal lines, and vice versa, either helping or hindering the runner and the chaser!
8. This game aims to create a 'family' tree between the whole group. Ask for one volunteer to



stand in the middle. Now, ask for someone to come and link up with this person by having a defined connection to him/her - for example, 'we go to the same school', 'we both like jazz music' or we both support United'. That person should then come and link up with the one in the middle. Now, ask for others, one at a time, to come and link up, either to the original volunteer or to the new link in the tree. No one must use the same connecting reason twice. People can join the tree at any point and any one person can have up to four connections by touching each hand or each foot. What sort of tree of connections can the whole group create?