



Lenten Gratitude Practices for Children and Families: UTO and Growing Gratefulness

Teaching Gratitude as a Lead Up to Easter

Dear Families,

Lent is a great time to focus on gratitude because it is a season of the church year that asks us to reflect on what God has done and is doing in our lives. For many families, Lent can feel like a difficult thing to talk to children about.

While children clearly can grasp right from wrong, the idea of repentance can be challenging. One of the things that we can help children **focus on is noticing the good things that happen and seeing God amid our daily lives**. Additionally, waiting on Easter is hard. In my household I am asked almost daily how long it is until the Easter Bunny comes, so this activity was created with elementary aged children in mind, who struggle with waiting for holidays but love marking the passage of time.

The materials provided here are meant to feel very simplistic, with the hope that we are not adding to the already very full schedules of families more work, but an opportunity to pause, reflect, share, and rejoice in the good things that God has done in the day that has passed. We hope this will spur discussions around dinner tables and connect our daily experiences as gifts from God to be received with gratitude.

The materials include:

1. An introductory lesson about gratitude along with discussion questions.
2. Crafts that can easily be printed and done at home that help visually mark the movement of time from Ash Wednesday to Easter.
3. A closing lesson on how to wrap up after Easter.

You can find additional liturgical resources for congregations and families in our **UTO Liturgy Booklet** which you can find here: <https://www.episcopalchurch.org/ministries/united-thank-offering/resources/> These prayers are a wonderful way to add even more meaning to your Lenten discipline of gratitude. If you would like more ideas on how to incorporate gratitude as a spiritual discipline for your family our blog has a wealth of resources. You can find them at www.unitedthankoffering.org or you can contact me at hmelton@episcopalchurch.org for help.

Thank you for inviting us on the Lenten Journey with your family. Be sure to share any photos or ideas on social media and tag us using #UTO #GratefulLent.

Heather Melton
Staff Officer, The United Thank Offering

UTO Bunny Blue Boxes and Lenten Countdown

Introductory Lesson

Background:

Many Episcopalians see Lent as a time to deepen their faith practices. Historically, this has been through giving something up, only to pick it back up again after Easter. Over the past few years, many have suggested that it might be a better observance of Lent to take on something new to grow more deeply in faith instead of giving something up.

This Lent, UTO encourages you and your congregation to take on intentionally practicing gratitude. **Gratitude is the work of noticing and responding to the good things God is doing in the world around us** and is a wonderful way to reflect during Lent. For children, Lent can be a struggle. By helping our children focus on gratitude and visually mark a countdown to Easter and the resurrection, we can help them focus on noticing all the good things happening in their life and teach them ways to respond to that goodness. Since most children do not have money of their own to make a thank offering, children will utilize the Blue Box more as a gratitude journal to track the good things happening each day in written form. Another option, for smaller children's is to give them coins or marbles to put in the Box or to make a thank offering after Easter when the box is full, and they have read all the notes put inside it. This empowers families to talk about generosity and gratitude while doing it in a way that is fully accessible to young children.

Scripture for Introducing the Project:

Colossians 3:17

As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Discussion:

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: compassion, kindness, humility, meekness and patience.

Some questions might be:

- I wonder how you show love to others?
- I wonder what it feels like to "put on" kindness and love like clothes?
- I wonder how you feel when you do something nice for someone else?
 - Does it make you want to do more nice things or less?
 - How do you think the other person feels when you do something nice for them?
- When someone thanks you for helping them, I wonder how you feel?
- I wonder how you could show kindness and love for others who might need it?
- What are some nice things you could do for people in our community?

Wrap Up and Transition:

- God gives us the gift of grace freely. We respond or say thank you to the gift of grace by doing good each and every day. Since we can't send a thank you note to God everything something good happens during our day, we remember those things and then say them in a prayer of thanks in the evening.
- The United Thank Offering is a ministry for every Episcopalian that you are going to get to join in. For over 125 years, Episcopalians have taken these little Blue Boxes home from church and put money or a note of thanksgiving into it each time something good has happened in their day as a way of saying thank you to God. Each year the boxes are collected and all the money in the boxes go to help people all over the world. This Lent,

I want us to practice gratitude every day as we countdown to Easter, so we are going to do a craft to help us remember and help us see how long it is until Easter.

Additional Resources to further discussion:

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

- *Maybe God is Like that Too* by Jennifer Grant
- *What is God Like?* by Rachel Held Evans
- *The Thank you Book* by Mo Willems
- *The Marvelous Mustard Seed* by Amy-Jill Levine

UTO also offers more resources for teaching gratitude at home on our website: www.unitedthankoffering.org

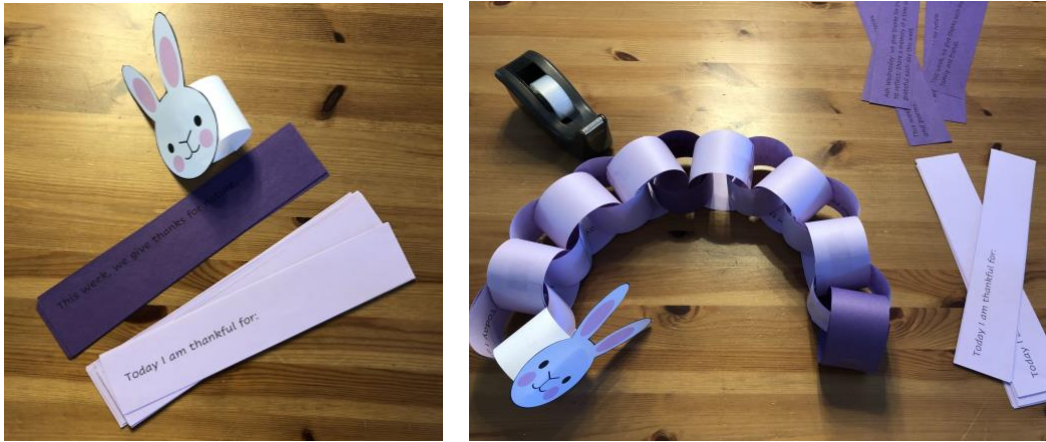
UTO Bunny Blue Boxes and Lenten Countdown

Craft Directions

Supplies:

1. **UTO Blue Box** for each child.
 - a. You can print one (in English or Spanish) or print a label to put on a box or can you already have at home here: <https://www.episcopalchurch.org/ministries/united-thank-offering/resources/>
 - b. You can order one from the distribution center here: <https://shimaofnavajoland.com/collections/united-thank-offering>
2. **Templates** – print the following for **each participant** (use cardstock for a sturdier presentation):
 - a. print pages 1-2 on one shade of purple, these represent the Sundays of Lent and Ash Wednesday. We've created a theme for each week and the space for you to create your own if you would prefer.
 - b. print page 3 10 times on a different shade of purple, these are the weekdays of Lent.
 - c. and print page 4 on white paper.
3. **Craft supplies:** Tape, Scissors (unless you pre-cut the pieces), Cotton Balls and Glue.

Activity:



1. We recommend beginning with the bunny link so that you can make sure it is facing the direction you want, however, you can also start with the Ash Wednesday link. You can tape the links with the text facing inward for a cleaner look or outward for a reminder to practice gratitude.
2. The bunny represents Easter Sunday, so there should be six links between it and the Sunday prompt. Keep going, six daily and one Sunday, until you have all of Lent represented. You will have one extra of the daily slips since we made the Ash Wednesday prompts like the Sunday prompt. (And remember, between Ash Wednesday and the Sunday prompt you'll only have 3 daily links.)
3. Have the children cut out the extra bunny face for their Blue Box and fold their box.
4. Glue the face on one end of the box and then use cotton balls to make the tail on the other end.
5. Explain that as they remove a link from the chain, they can write what they are thankful for on it and put it in their Blue Box. Tell them that you will collect all the boxes after Easter as a thank offering for all of the blessings the class has experienced throughout Lent.
6. Close by saying how thankful you are for them. And be sure to include the letter to parents to explain how to use the project at home.

Alternative for smaller children:



For very young children, doing the paper chain might not work. Alternatively, you can simply count out enough coins or marbles and put them in a jar for each child to put in their bunny Blue Box each day during Lent and share something they are thankful for. As the coins diminish, it will visually show that time is moving closer to Easter.

Some photos of finished crafts:



UTO Bunny Blue Boxes and Lenten Countdown

Follow Up Lesson

Background:

This Lent, your family has spent time each day intentionally practicing gratitude. **Gratitude is the work of noticing and responding to the good things God is doing in the world around us.** One of the ways to make the work of paying attention and giving thanks feel more meaningful is to take a moment to reflect and remember all the good things that we've experienced. It can be exciting and joyful to see all the blessings we noticed and encouraging us to keep practicing gratitude. For those of you that used marbles or coins to mark the passage of time, you can also take those out and notice how many good things happened while you waited on Easter.

We're going to reflect on the good things that happened before Easter. Then we'll notice that we are told that Jesus is out ahead of us on the road to Galilee and wonder about ways that we might be able to notice where Jesus has gone.

Supplies:

1. **UTO Blue Box** from your Lenten discipline.
2. **UTO Grant List** – you can order one from our distribution center or download it on the resources page at www.episcopalchurch.org/uto (We also have a list of every grant awarded since the beginning of UTO 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 they were thankful for books, UTO has given numerous grants to educational programs, from Reading Camp in the Diocese of Lexington to computer labs in Palestine.)

Scripture for Introducing the Project:

Mark 16:1-8

When the sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him. ²And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. ³They had been saying to one another, 'Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?' ⁴When they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had already been rolled back. ⁵As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man, dressed in a white robe, sitting on the right side; and they were alarmed. ⁶But he said to them, 'Do not be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here. Look, there is the place they laid him. ⁷But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you.' ⁸So they went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.

Discussion:

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: terror, amazement, and you might want to talk about how Galilee is a town some distance from Jerusalem.

Some questions might be:

- I wonder how it felt for the women to see the angel?
- I wonder how you would feel if you saw an angel?
- I wonder what it feels like to feel terror and amazement?
- I wonder what they did when they learned Jesus was on the road ahead of them to Galilee?
- I wonder what you would do if you heard that Jesus was on the road ahead of you, just outside of your town?
- If you were following someone, what clues or signs would you look for to find where they went?
- I wonder what clues or signs Jesus leaves for us on the way?

Wrap Up and Transition:

- One of the things that we believe is that Jesus is alive and out in the world. Our job as Christians is to pay attention to the clues and signs that Jesus is still among us. When we notice these clues, it is good to stop and give thanks for them.

- Clues can be anything from people helping others, being kind, or as big as trying to make the world a better place. When we notice good things happening in our daily lives, it can be a sign for how we are supposed to treat others, and it can be a clue of how Jesus loves us through others, and how we are to do the same.

Activity:

1. Open the box and read all the slips of paper and reflect on all the awesome things that they experienced while waiting for Easter. Celebrate memories, maybe give thanks once again for the people named and all the ways that they are signs and clues of the love of Jesus.
2. After reading all of the thanksgivings and if your child uses a *Share, Save, Spend* bank, (or has money available to donate to help others) encourage them to share some of their money as a thank offering to God for all of the blessings they experienced over the last few weeks in your Blue Box to take to church for the UTO Ingathering or online at www.unitedthankoffering.org. Explain that all the money that goes to UTO goes on to help others be signs and clues of God love in the world.

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 your child for participating in the Lenten program, please email Heather Melton at hmelton@episcopalchurch.org and she will send a card. Please note that we do not keep this information, we only use it to thank children for participating in our Lenten program.

Additional Resources to further discussion:

If you'd like to keep talking about gratitude in your home and UTO, we offer resources and support on our webpage www.episcopalchurch.org/uto or www.unitedthankoffering.org there you can find journal prompts, thanksgiving lessons 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.