

To make your Thanksgiving dinner an intentional outreach event, read over this short history and then share it with your guests. Rather than reading it, or translating it directly into their language, *tell* the story in your own words.

A Short History of THANKSGIVING



The First Thanksgiving at Plymouth by Brownscombe

"Our harvest being gotten in, our governor sent four men on fowling, that so we might after a special manner rejoice together."

Edward Winslow

In New England, the first Thanksgiving Day was celebrated in Plymouth, Massachusetts in 1621 by the Pilgrims together with 91 Indians. The Pilgrims first set foot at Plymouth Rock on December 11, 1620. The first winter in Massachusetts was very harsh and 46 out of the original 102 Pilgrims died. It is believed that the Indians helped the Pilgrims through that difficult period and without them, the Pilgrims would not have survived.

In the following Spring of 1621, Samoset of the Wampanoag Tribe and Squanto of the Pawtuxet tribe, taught the survivors how to plant corn or maize and how to catch alewives, a kind of fish to be used as a fertilizer for growing pumpkins, beans, peas and other crops. These two braves also taught the Pilgrims the art of hunting and angling. Things got better in 1621 when the corn and pumpkin harvest was bountiful. Governor William Bradford made arrangements to celebrate the bountiful harvest and to recognize the help given to the colonists by the Indians with a feast. The Indians who had helped them survive were invited; among them the great king Massasoit, with some ninety Indian men. Governor William Bradford sent four men out "fowling" after ducks and geese but no one is sure if it included wild turkeys. The Pilgrims used to call any type of wild fowl "turkey".

In 1623 a day of fasting and prayer during a period of drought was changed to one of thanksgiving because the rain came during the prayers. Gradually the custom prevailed in New England of annually celebrating thanksgiving after the harvest.

During the American Revolution a yearly day of national thanksgiving was suggested by the Continental Congress. In 1817 New York State adopted Thanksgiving Day as an annual custom, and by the middle of the 19th century many other states had done the same. In 1863 President Abraham

Lincoln appointed a day of thanksgiving as the last Thursday in November, which he may have correlated it with the November 21, 1621, anchoring of the *Mayflower* at Cape Cod. Since then, each president has issued a Thanksgiving Day proclamation. President Franklin D. Roosevelt set the date for Thanksgiving to the fourth Thursday of November in 1939 (approved by Congress in 1941).

Seven other nations also celebrate an official Thanksgiving Day, though on a different date: Argentina, Brazil, Canada, Japan, Korea, Liberia and Switzerland.

The primary purpose of Thanksgiving Day is to express gratitude to God for his many gifts. Although sometimes this gets forgotten in our secular culture today, still most people realize that our thanksgiving should be directed most of all in God's direction.

After sharing a summary about the history of Thanksgiving, take time to pray a prayer of thanksgiving. *If appropriate, you may ask your guests to also express their thanks to God.* One way this can be done is to "hide" 3 kernels of un-popped popcorn under each person's plate. When the plates are cleared, go around the table giving each person an opportunity to express appreciation for 3 different things.