

# The UTO (United Thank Offering) Story

## A Godly Play-Style Story



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*If you're new to Godly Play, please see the special note on the last page.*

**Story Photo Overviews** *When your story is completed, it will look similar to this:*



*(listener's perspective)*

*(storyteller's perspective)*



## The Story

People say, "thank you." People all over the world say, "thank you." There are lots of reasons why people say this. I wonder if you can think of a reason why you might say, "thank you?"

That's right. Those are good reasons to say, "thank you."

*As you bring their focus into the story, try to encourage specificity. The answer "food" is fine on its own, don't judge it. But ask, "what kinds of food are you thankful for?" Or: "People." "I wonder which people?" Or: "Family." "Which person in your family are you thankful for today?"*

We have a story about saying, "thank you." Let's get ready to hear it. Watch and see where I go to get the story. When it's your turn to work with the materials, you'll know where this story lives in our classroom.

*In our classroom, we keep this box on the Saints & Heroes shelves. The cloth we use is the closest color to UTO blue, a cornflower/turquoise color. The story's box is painted the same color.*

*Bring the story to the circle and unfold the underlay. Our underlay is 44" wide (the width of the bolt) by 18" deep. It's a piece of common broadcloth. The most important thing about your underlay, of course, is that all the materials fit nicely without crowding and the story accumulates by being "read" (from the listener's perspective) from left to right.*

(At this point in the story, of course, you've only placed the underlay).

People all over the world say, "thank you." If you lived in \_\_\_\_\_, you might say, "\_\_\_\_\_."

If you lived in \_\_\_\_\_, you might say, "\_\_\_\_\_."

People all over the world say, "thank you."

Fill in the blanks above with countries and languages using wood tiles that have a flag on one side and the printed words on the reverse that say "thank you" in the corresponding language. We used balsa wood, cut about 4 1/2" by 3". The flag graphics came from online images, reduced or enlarged to be the same size (about 3 1/2" by 2 1/4"). On the reverse, we placed the words in a simple, large white typefont on a blue background color (this is a "cheat" for the storyteller, and enhances the story when your children are at a reading level and working on their own with the materials). Everything was Modge-Podge'd. Note that in higher heat and humidity, they tend to "stick" to each other in the box. A coat of clear varnish might solve that problem.



We use ten of these wooden cards and chose a mix of nations (in no particular order): France, Korea, Germany, Pakistan, Wales, Italy, Greece, Japan, Swaziland, Mexico. We had to consult online phonetic dictionaries for some of the pronunciations.

Be clear in your pronunciations. The children might laugh at some of the foreign-sounding words. Pay no attention to that. Give them time to echo back the words, but don't require it. Someone might ask, "Why is there a dragon on that one?" Just answer, "Hmmm, I wonder why" and move on without getting caught up in the details in the flags. (This just may prompt one of your older kids to do some research on his own). Later, if your wondering questions need to be expanded, you might ask, "I wonder what is the same in some of these flags?" or "I wonder which of these flags you like the best?"

But sometimes the words just aren't enough. Sometimes our thankfulness feelings spill over and we simply must DO something with them. There are many things we can do with our thankfulness:

Maybe we can write a letter or send a card. We can write down our feelings of thankfulness.

Maybe we can sing a song to a person when we're feeling thankful.

Maybe we can give them something, like a flower.

Maybe we can show them how thankful we are with a hug.

There are many things we can do with our thankfulness feelings.

Place each symbol accordingly.



The little wooden pieces were purchased at a craft store (Michael's) for about 49c each. There are actually five pieces -- the pencil is a separate piece glued onto the book. You could use other things to represent these activities, maybe clip art glued onto balsa wood. It doesn't matter, as long as the graphics are uncluttered and similar to each other in style.

People all over the world have some interesting ways of showing their thankfulness.

At a wedding in China, there is an old custom of saying, “thank you” in a special way. The new groom sometimes serves tea to his wife’s parents, and the new bride sometimes serves tea to her husband’s parents, to say, “Thank you for raising the child that grew to be the person I married today.”

People all over the world say, “thank you” in different ways.



*The inline story above is something that caught my attention when I was researching the topic of thanksgiving customs. You might find another story that captures you that you can easily illustrate. The point is that it's a story about a special custom of giving thanks and is interesting to think about. The bonus with this particular story is that it allowed me to put something precious and breakable into the story box -- a real china teacup and saucer set. Whenever possible, we do not use plastic in our Godly Play room. We reinforce the Montessori theory that our materials should be beautiful and carefully crafted, showing respect for the story and for the children's ability to use them properly. If it's not possible for you to use a real china set, go ahead and use what you can. But try to make sure it doesn't look too "cutesy" or juvenile. You can make simple but elegant storage bags for each item, out of white satin or silk, to signify their specialness.*

Even though there are different ways to say, “thank you,” there are some ways that are the same, all over the world.

All over the world, people say “thank you” to God for the blessings of this life.

Sometimes the people bring the very first or the very last of their farm harvests to the church, and take them to the altar to say, “thank you” to God.

*Place the items accordingly.*

*The dried grass looks like wheat, and one day the children will make a connection with that and the Eucharist. (Don't bring that into this discussion, let it be discovered). Any other mini plastic (an exception to the rule!) fruits or veggies can be found in a craft store, try to keep them small.*



Sometimes people bring flowers, or the money to buy flowers, to make the church look beautiful at worship, to say “thank you” to God for something special. Sometimes these flowers are taken after the worship to someone who couldn’t come to worship. And then this person gets to share in the beauty of that thankfulness.

*Our flowers are just little leftover bits stuck together with floral tape.*

Sometimes people ring a bell in church to say, “thank you.”

*Any nice little handbell works. Ours was a gift from our priest, specifically for this story.*

And people all over the world say, “thank you” to God with their money. People bring a portion of their money as a thankful offering to God, and then that money is used to help the Church do its work and to give to others.



*Don't bring the money out yet. Just talk about it and then bring it out as you move on to the next part of the story:*



One day a long time ago, a group of women were gathered for a meeting and the time came to gather their offerings. This group of women were meeting to talk about the work of the Church and all the good work that they wanted to do. When the offering time came, the people there were very generous.

*The purple bag should really be a little coin purse. I just don't have one on hand. For the coins, use one of each (quarter, dime, nickel, penny) and pull them out one by one, leaving the extra penny in the bag.*

When the money offering was all counted, they knew they could do some of the work they wanted to do in the Church. But it just wasn't enough for all of the work.

And so they talked together and prayed together and decided that they should all think about all the things that they were thankful to God for. They decided that they would think on all these wonderful thankful things and reach way down into their pockets and find some extra coins and give thanks to God and put those extra coins into the collection, too. We call this kind of giving money a “thank offering.”

*Dig out the extra penny (you can make a little show of getting your fingers way into the recesses of the bag or coin purse), and set it apart. (I didn't bother with a photo of a penny).*

This time, when the money offering was counted, they had enough to do some of the extra work they really wanted to do.

With their extra, thankful coins, they were able to build a school and then a church in Anvik, Alaska, a far away place. The people in this place needed a school for their children and a church so that the people could worship God together and share the feast.



The photos are optional, but really help make the story concrete. I had some balsa wood pieces left over and found the photos online from the University of Alaska archives. I used photo editing software to give them a little tint of blue, and Modge-Podge'd them onto the wood. In the bottom photo, you can see the front of the church in Anvik. The top photo shows both the church (on the left) and the school behind it. When we're all done with the story, sometimes I pass the pieces around so the children can get a closer look.

A “thank offering” helps us know that even little bits of extra coins have great power in them. At this church, we have these blue boxes for our thank offerings.

Place the UTO box (from the story materials box) at the end of the cloth.

“United” means “everyone together.”

These blue boxes are just one way that everyone together can give their thanks to God. The money that goes into the boxes is the extra money we have, and it gets passed on to help the work of the Church.

Now, I wonder ...

You can come up with your own open-ended reflections. Suggestions are:

- What was your favorite part of this story?
- If you know any other languages of the world that say, “thank you.”
- If you know any other ways that people can say, “thank you.”
- If you have ever seen this box, or one that looks like it, before.
- If you have ever put a thank offering into this kind of box.
- If you have ever seen people bring the money offerings to the Feast.
- What other things people might bring to the Feast to say, “thank you.”



Here are closer images of the completed story, from the listener’s perspective:



## Extending the Story: the Classroom's UTO Box

In our Godly Play classroom, we have a UTO box, and a side basket of nickels, in our prayer corner. The nickels, a few rolls' worth, were provided by people in the parish. The children know that they can go there and put a coin in the box, whenever we're not in our circle together. We sometimes bring the set to our circle to use when we're praying together.

At our Fall and Spring UTO Ingatherings, the children bring the box up to the altar at the offertory time. To save work for our Counting Sheep (the bookkeepers), an friendly benefactor will simply write a check and slip it into the offertory on behalf of the children and then later, away from the children, I'll empty the nickels back into the classroom's basket to be reused. (Sometimes I have to do this throughout the year, if the box has had extra attention).

The children and we never open the box and count the nickels -- because the focus is on the giving, not the accumulating. Sometimes we talk about where UTO grants have gone, but we don't speculate on where the money will go in the future. With older children, the conversation might deepen into wondering together about why people have piggy banks (usually to save up for something, usually to have a goal) and why that is different from a thank offering.

The action of putting a coin into the box can be fun for the child. To keep the focus on the purpose of thank offerings, we've had to adopt the "one coin per vist" rule. That helps make it special.

Often at the end of the UTO story, I go to the prayer corner and bring our UTO box and nickel basket (it is lined with leftover fabric from the story's underlay) and say:

**I wonder what you are thankful for today. I wonder if you would like to say "thank you" to God for that thankfulness and then put a coin in a blue box. Here are some coins for you and here is our classroom's UTO box. Any time you have a thankful feeling, you can say "thank you" to God and put a coin in our box.**

## Note for those new to Godly Play:

Storytelling is what the people of God do. It's how we pass on our faith to others. At points throughout history, people began to write these stories down -- but long before the writing was the telling. We all have a story to tell. Godly Play is all about sharing the stories and the language of our faith. You don't have to be a Certified Godly Play Teacher to tell your story. But we invite you to find out more about this particular method of Christian formation and how we use our time and develop our materials.

You can find more information at [www.GodlyPlay.org](http://www.GodlyPlay.org).

For more information about how Godly Play is used at Christ Church, contact [LisaB@ChristEpiscopal.org](mailto:LisaB@ChristEpiscopal.org).



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