

CREATING COMMON GROUND: SUGGESTIONS FOR COMPLIANCE WITH THE NATIONAL FFA INCLUSION STATEMENT

FFA makes a positive difference in the lives of students by developing their potential for premier leadership, personal growth and career success through agricultural education.

As a nation, the recognition and celebration of diversity of thought and religion is one of our greatest assets. The National FFA Organization takes great pride in welcoming all students who are interested in agricultural education. Its staff and members--from the national to the local level--work diligently to uphold the highest standards of inclusiveness and pluralism, regardless of ethnicity, gender, religious affiliation or any other characteristic that could alienate or exclude someone from participation. The National FFA Board of Directors has approved and adopted the following inclusion statement for all employees and staff associated with the National FFA Organization as a means of adhering to established federal laws and driving inclusion within the National FFA Organization.

National FFA Organization Statement of Inclusion Guidelines for National FFA Organization Personnel

Approved and Adopted by the National FFA Board of Directors January 31, 2018

As a federally chartered school-based youth development organization, The National FFA Organization will comply with the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment, which forbids school-sponsored prayer or religious indoctrination. The National FFA Organization is not, nor has ever been a faith-based organization. The National FFA Organization is an inclusive organization where all are welcome and encouraged to be themselves as each engages in the pursuit of our mission to ensure that FFA members strive toward the development of leadership, personal growth, and career success.

In the daily routine of any FFA staff member, FFA Staff might participate in silent reflections as a means of beginning or concluding FFA event meetings/activities. Silent reflection allows all members to individually reflect in the manner in which they are comfortable. **Verbal reflections as part of any organized FFA meeting or event, including an attitude of appreciation prior to a meal are to be free of faith-based perspective, reference, or prayer as not to exclude any FFA member, stakeholder or guest. These guidelines should also apply to written and visual communications including but not limited to print, social media, or other outlets representing the National FFA Organization.**

National FFA officers are considered volunteers or elected staff of the National FFA Organization, and, as such, must uphold these guidelines. Additionally, these guidelines will be followed by both full time and seasonal/temporary employees during an official capacity representing the organization. The National FFA Board of Directors are the officers of the National FFA Organization based upon the federal charter and as officers of the organization must uphold these guidelines.

PUBLIC ADDRESSES

Presenting a public address is an opportunity extended to many of our members or employees / staff as a component of serving the organization. It is also an opportunity to create common ground, celebrate the rich

traditions of FFA and agricultural education, and recognize excellence. The goal of an effective presentation is to change an attitude, behavior or to teach a new skill. Sharing a message should represent an FFA platform--not a personal platform. For the message of the public address or presentation to be effective, the message should be inclusive, easily shared and understood by listeners from different traditions, faiths or cultures. Simply, the first rule of effective, persuasive communication in public speaking is to know your audience!

WHEN CREATING AN INCLUSIVE MESSAGE:

- Share in a moderate way personal experiences or stories that have made a significant impact on thinking, behavior or actions.
- Share a personal perspective on leadership.
- Share a broad range of experiences, friends, family, community, while recognizing the differences between cultures and backgrounds.

WHEN CREATING AN INCLUSIVE MESSAGE, DO NOT:

- Suggest, infer or state that personal faith or beliefs are the best way, only way, or “American way” to have a spiritual relationship.
- Recommend personal religious beliefs.
- Exclude or alienate any member, teacher or guest by suggesting or saying that other faiths are not acceptable or are wrong.
- Single out a religious book or writing as being the only acceptable one
- Use a specific reference to a religion, religious literature, and/or religious leader. (For example, specific reference to Jesus, Our Father, God Almighty, Father God, the Holy Spirit, Jehovah, Allah, etc. all denote a specific religious orientation and is exclusionary)
- Encourage others to join through evangelical actions or statements.
- Use a religious symbol as part of a public address.

PUBLIC REFLECTION AND INVOCATIONS

We are often called upon to provide a public reflection or invocation for a variety of occasions. This should be viewed as a privilege and as a responsibility. Much like public addresses or presentations, the message of the reflection or invocation should represent FFA members as well as advisors, community members and others who may have an interest in the organization. This can be a challenge, but as we consider the increasing globalization of agricultural education it also provides an opportunity to recognize our society encompasses a diversity of faiths and traditions.

If inclusive, the reflection or invocation can and should bind the community together. However, it can be divisive when forms of language exclude persons from faith traditions different than that of the speaker or others at the gathering. The following may assist in avoiding embarrassment and misunderstanding, while representing the organization at the highest level of excellence.

- Be clear in understanding the purpose and the nature of the occasion.
- Carefully plan the reflection or invocation to be inclusive and nonsectarian.
- Use words that allow people of different faiths to give assent to what is said.
- Remain true to the purposes of giving thanks and seek to bless.
- Do not use it as an opportunity to preach, argue, testify or promote.
- Consider other creative alternatives, such as a moment of silent reflection.

Examples of Effective Inclusive Invocations:

- Please join me in a moment of reflection. Give us grateful hearts for this opportunity to come together, the harvest of this meal and the friendships we enjoy. Please keep us healthy, productive and mindful of the needs of others.

- Blessed are we to have this meal and grateful for the hands that prepared it.
- Please join me for our invocation...Thank you for this day and for the gifts of freedom and fellowship we are able to embrace with one another. Thank you for this organization, that like a family, has a place for everyone to meet, make friends and embrace accomplishments. Let us be humble in receiving, generous in giving and always thankful.
- Let us take a moment to give thanks. We give thanks for the many blessings given to us, such as the opportunity to gather together and give thanks for this organization and the legacy it has enjoyed. Let this gathering deeply impact us as we remain receptive and open for growth. Thank you for our blessings.
- As members of this great organization, we are given so many wonderful opportunities and we are thankful for this time to gather together. Please join me for a moment of silence to reflect and give thanks on all we are grateful for at this time. (moment of silence) Please enjoy your meal.

Below are additional samples of reflections, graces, and other mindfulness practices from various authors and traditions. View these as inspirations as you create your own statements for public addresses, reflections or invocations:

- Offer a non-religious inspirational reading, quote or poem that ties to the goals and mission of the event followed by a moment of silence.
- Thank everyone for their contributions to the organization and ask for a moment of silence.
- For a quiet moment, I invite you to express gratitude, for goals met, honors, and the gift of intellect, mentors, the support of family and friends, and a society that encourages and funds education.
- As we gather, recognizing our diversity in beliefs, values, faith traditions, but honoring our unity in gratitude, I invite you to reflect quietly on all that is yet to be while expressing thanks for: the gift of intellect, goals met, the support of family and friends, mentors, and a society that encourages and funds education.
- Continuing to reflect with gratitude, ask for blessing on the mission of this school and for those given the public trust. As we journey forth filled with knowledge and dreams let us continue to learn from our diversity, filled with compassion, to honor the peaceful, nurture the fragile, empower the impoverished, sensing wonder in the ordinary.
- May the gratitude that we experience on this day of new beginnings be the focus for all that is to come.
- We gather on this grand day, understanding that we come from different places, hold different values, and cherish different beliefs. Yet, today we are united in gratitude.
- In a world where many have no community, we are thankful for the support of mentors, teachers, family, and friends.
- As we go on from this grand day, on different paths, to different experiences, and different destinies, may our gratitude unite us in the desire of using all that we are and all that we have for the common good so that reasons to be thankful will fill every life.
- May our gratitude on this grand day grow into peace for each, and freedom to live, work, and serve throughout all our days.
- Thanks to the hands that brought our food
and those who worked to grow it,
what we receive from the plants and beasts,
and the earth for all we owe it.
- Earth we thank you for our food,
For work and play and all that's good,

For wind and rain and sun above,
But most of all for those we love.

- Let There Be Peace on Earth and let it begin with me.
Let There Be Peace on Earth, the peace that we long to see!
With Earth as our mother, family all are we.
Let us walk with each other in perfect harmony.
- Let peace begin with me. Let this be the moment now.
With ev'ry breath I take, let this be my solemn vow;
To take each moment and live each moment in peace eternally!
Let there be peace on earth and let it begin with me!
- Gratitude means taking a moment to pause and reflect on the good in our lives. I am grateful for...
- "I am grateful for _____."
- "May this sharing of food foster peace and understanding among us. May it bring us to the recognition that we depend on each other for all the good we can ever hope to receive, and that all the good we can hope to accomplish rests in helping others in turn."
- "What a great occasion! We are gathered here together in the safety of this place, each of us taking a moment from our busy, separate lives, to enjoy this wonderful meal with ones we love. Let this evening be a special time in our lives, a blessed stopping point in which we can simply enjoy who we are, where we are, and what we are doing. Let us enjoy this magnificent meal now with family and friends. Thank you, to those who prepared this beautiful meal."
- "We receive this food in gratitude to all beings
Who helped or sacrificed to bring it to our table,
And vow to respond in turn to those in need
With wisdom and compassion."
- "As we go through life, the most important thing we can collect is good memories. Thank you all for being here today to share this meal as a treasured part of that collection."
- "We have created this meal to serve and sustain our lives. Let us enjoy this meal in the full knowledge that all life is purposeful action aimed toward our highest value."
- For the meal we are about to eat,
For those who made it possible,
And for those with whom we are about to share it,
We are thankful.
- In this home all are one
As are the earth, the stars and sun
With head and heart and hands be blessed
That each of us may do our best

- As we prepare to eat,
Let us remember the plants and animals,
The labor of those who harvested the food
And the effort of the cook who prepared it for us.
Thank you!
- The day is done
it cannot be changed,
my actions and my thoughts
reflected my own spirit on this day,
of some, I am proud, of some, I am not.
When I wake . . . there will be new chances
to think and act with wisdom and compassion
there will be new temptations to be petty, small or selfish.
May I choose wisely and well from waking to day's end.
- I do not think that the measure of a civilization
is how tall its buildings of concrete are,
but rather how well its people have learned to relate
to their environment and fellow man.
- "Let us take a moment to think about where the food we are about to enjoy has come from and to acknowledge those who worked to bring us this food. Let us appreciate the earth, the sun, the air, and the water needed to nourish the plants and animals. Let us thank the farmer who cared for the plants and animals and the migrant worker who toiled to harvest the crops. Let us thank the laborer who processed the food, the truck driver who brought the food, and the grocery store workers who displayed it. Finally, let us thank our friends who prepared this meal and have provided us with the opportunity to be together and share each others' company."
- "As we come together to share this meal, let us first remember how it came to us and be thankful to the people who made it possible. This food was born from the bounty of the Earth, in warm sunlight, rich earth and cool rain. May it nourish us, in body and mind, and provide us with the things that are good for living. We are grateful to those who cultivated it, those who harvested it, those who brought it to us and those who prepared it. May its consumption bring about the pleasures of friendship, love and good company. And as we partake of this food in each other's company, as what was once separate from all of us becomes part of each of us, may we also remember what we have in common and what brings us all together. May this sharing of food foster peace and understanding among us, may it bring us to the recognition that we depend on each other for all the good we can ever hope to receive, and that all the good we can hope to accomplish rests in helping others in turn. May it remind us that as we reach out to others to brighten their lives, so are our lives brightened in turn."
- "As we come together at this special time, let us pause a moment to appreciate the opportunity for good company and to thank all those past and present whose efforts have made this event possible. We reap the fruits of our society, our Country, and our civilization, and take joy in the bounties of Nature on this happy occasion. Let us also wish that, some day, all people on Earth may enjoy the same good fortune that we share."
- May we have grateful hearts for all we receive and be ever mindful of the needs of others.
- We pause on this day to consider all we have to be grateful for:
For the wonders of the natural world and the beauty of each season in turn.
For the resources of this world, to be valued and used wisely.

For the people around the globe with whom we share a common humanity and desire for a better, more peaceful world.

For the connection with family and friends who nurture and support us each day, especially those gathered with us today.

For the food we are about to share and for all who brought it to us.

For the future and all the opportunities that are before us.

We acknowledge all these things today with appreciation and gratitude.

- Corn and grain, meat and milk
Upon our table width and length
With loving thought and careful craft
Through so many hands have passed
Essence of life, fruits of our labors
Bringing sustenance and strength
To ours and all our neighbors
May we all be grateful for all we have
And compassion for those without.
- As we come together at this special time, let us pause a moment to appreciate the opportunity for good company and to thank all those past and present whose efforts have made this event possible. We reap the fruits of our society, our country, and our civilization, and take joy in the bounties of nature on this happy occasion. Let us also wish that, some day, all people on Earth may enjoy the same good fortune that we share.
- “We are grateful for the food before us, the friends beside us, the love among us.”
- For what we are about to receive, let us be thankful and ever mindful of those less fortunate than ourselves.
- “Let us think thrice while we are gathering here for this meal.
First, let us think of the people we are with today, and make the most of the pleasure of sharing food and drink together.
Then, let us think of the people who made the food and drink and brought it to us, who serve us and wait on us, and who clear up and clean up after us.
Finally, let us think of all the people all over the world, members with us in the human family, who will not have a meal today.”
- “May this meal we’re about to share help our spirits shine brighter.
May this brightness send darkness away and
warm the hearts of strangers.”
- *A morning reflection:* As I face today’s challenges, I will act with reason and mindfulness, be flexible and positive in attitude, and act with compassion toward all others. Today I will focus on [what is one thing you want to be intentional about today? kindness? active listening? healthy eating? humor and making people smile? giving compliments?]
- May kindness grow within me,
bringing deeper awareness of life’s facets,
touching all who I meet, with a good feeling,
brightening the day of others, in my wake.

- May each action I take, be rooted in kindness,
in everything, there is a kind and unkind way
to move forward, to resolve a situation, to be.
May the depth of my kindness increase, daily.
- We are so grateful for this food,
it restores our strength,
it heals our bodies,
it fuels our brains.
- We are so grateful for this time,
to renew our spirit,
to share our trials,
to find new strength.
- All that we have is a gift.
May we be thankful.
May we celebrate.
May we share.
- For our friends,
for our families,
for our meal,
we are thankful.
- For life,
for healing,
for joy,
we are thankful.
- Thanks to the earth for the soil.
Thanks to the sky for the rains.
Thanks to the farmers for the harvest.
Thanks to our friends for the love.