**PRAYER AT EXTENSION EVENTS**

When opening Extension events or starting meals at meetings it is important to remember that we must be inclusive of all participants. Denominational prayers can and have been found by courts to be illegal as discrimination. Given Extension's connection with the federal, state and county governments, and as representatives of two universities, it is even more important that we do not introduce behaviors or actions that could be deemed exclusionary and therefore also illegal and discriminatory.

We also recognize that prayer is an important part of the lives of many in North Carolina. It is our policy in Extension that our employees should not perform an invocation before a meal or event. When appropriate, we much prefer that you ask a member of the audience to provide an invocation. If you have to do so because there is no other option, here are some examples of nonsecular invocations that can be used:

1. A moment of silence. This can be provided for people to pray as they chose.
2. Consider following the lead of 4-H and FCS, offer a “Thought for the Day”
3. We pause for a moment in our busy lives to reflect and express appreciation for the gifts of life. We live and work in a world that offers challenges as well as great opportunities. We ask for patience, one with another, as we seek ways to make a true lasting difference in our communities and state – honoring and valuing the complete person that each of our colleagues and clients are. We give thanks for the meal that has been prepared for us and for the sustenance it will provide as we go about our work in service to others.
4. We meet together in an effort to build community and to advance education and understanding. We seek the patience of each other as we strive to learn and grow and the stamina to make a difference in our state, nation and world. We express our thanks for the gifts of life and for the food that we are about to partake.
5. We gather here today as colleagues and friends with attention to a common goal. That goal is the continued service to the citizens of our state through our programs and information. We understand our responsibilities as committed educators as well as learners – personally and professionally. We seek the patience of each other as we strive to learn and grow, and the stamina to make a difference in our state, nation and the world.
6. We express our thanks for an opportunity to gather together where we can reinforce our community principles of openness and engagement for all people, for the gifts of life and for the food that has been prepared for us. For all these things we express our thanks.

Please also see page 8 of our Civil Rights Plan that provides comments on the Separation of Church and State.” <https://evaluation.ces.ncsu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/NCCE-civil-rights-plan.pdf?fwd=no>

NC Cooperative Extension. February 15, 2020