

Lenten Greetings Friends in Christ

As we draw near to the crucifixion and death of our Saviour Jesus Christ, under normal circumstances, we would have come together tonight for our Tenebrae or Maundy Thursday services. This would have been a time where we would retell the events of the activities in the Upper Room and events leading to Calvary together. Unfortunately, this will not be the case this year. Although this may be sad for many of us, I believe it gives us an opportunity to have tonight's focus on more than just the re-enactment of Jesus' Last Supper and the washing of feet. But to also give us an intimate opportunity to place ourselves in the scene and connect with the moment. It is with this in mind, that our evening today will focus on sharing our personal understanding of the events in the Upper Room, with our families or individually. The focus this evening is to lead us in a liturgical experience of Holy Thursday and allow each of us a space to share what this all means for us in our lives and how we are to live in community going forward. Since we will not be sharing in Communion this evening, as we usually would, the reflections will take shape in the form of a Love Feast or what others call the Agape Meal. As part of our liturgy, I have included a brief history and meaning of the Love Feast from the United Methodist Church website. This will allow us to recall the meals Jesus shared with his disciples. This will also allow us to share in a meal as a family and pray that Jesus be part of it, whilst also reflecting on the power that lies behind meal-sharing with those whom we love. I am aware that for some this may be a bit difficult without family and friends around you. But it is my wish that you will still follow the liturgy and pray for those you would have loved to share this meal with. Furthermore, I ask all of us in our prayers this evening, to be mindful of those whose loved ones have been affected negatively by the lockdown and the Coronavirus outbreak. People such as our medical professionals working throughout this time, and those who are mourning the loss of a loved one during this time. It is my hope that once the lockdown is lifted, we will have a chance to share in a Love Feast with all our extended family and friends we could not share this evening with.

What will you need?

- Your Bible and journal (Journals would be for those who have been writing their personal reflections). You can use the family reflections attached for your personal sharing part.
- Water Basin and Towel if you would like to also include the washing of feet.
- Appoint a leader who will lead the family in the liturgy.
- Set up a table or a setup where you will all sit in a circle.
- A basket of bread/crackers to be shared and passed around as a symbol of the passing of bread that would take place at the meal with Jesus.
- A beverage that can be shared by all including children at the table such as water, juice, coffee or tea. The idea of a love feast is to avoid using communion elements.
- Offering for retiring collection or poor fund.
- This may be followed by a sharing in a full meal.
- The liturgy is there simply as a guide and you can adapt it to your needs and preferences as a family.

Wishing you all a blessed Holy Thursday and Easter Weekend!! God bless!!

¹THE LOVE FEAST

The Love Feast, or Agape Meal, is a Christian fellowship meal recalling the meals Jesus shared with disciples during his ministry and expressing the koinonia (community, sharing, fellowship) enjoyed by the family of Christ.

Although its origins in the early church are closely interconnected with the origins of the Lord's Supper, the two services became quite distinct and should not be confused with each other. While the Lord's Supper has been practically universal among Christians throughout church history, the Love Feast has appeared only at certain times and among certain denominations.

The modern history of the Love Feast began when Count Zinzendorf and the Moravians in Germany introduced a service of sharing food, prayer, religious conversation, and hymns in 1727. John Wesley first experienced it among the Moravians in Savannah, Georgia, ten years later. His diary notes: "After evening prayers, we joined with the Germans in one of their love-feasts. It was begun and ended with thanksgiving and prayer and celebrated in so decent and solemn a manner as a Christian of the apostolic age would have allowed to be worthy of Christ."

It quickly became a feature of the Evangelical Revival and a regular part of Methodist society meetings in Great Britain and throughout the English-speaking world. As Methodists immigrated to North America, they made Love Feasts an important part of early American Methodism.

While Love Feasts became less frequent in the years that followed, they continued to be held in some places; and in recent years the Love Feast has been revived. Love Feasts have often been held at Annual Conferences and Charge Conferences, where persons may report on what God has been doing in their lives and on the hope and trust they place in God for the future. The Love Feast is also an important part of the practice of Covenant Discipleship groups. Christmas, New Year's Eve or Day, the weekdays of Holy Week, and the Day of Pentecost are also fitting occasions for a Love Feast. A Love Feast may also be held during a congregational supper.

The Love Feast has often been held on occasions when the celebration of the Lord's Supper would be inappropriate—where there is no one present authorized to administer the Sacrament, when persons of different denominations are present who do not feel free to take Holy Communion together, when there is a desire for a service more informal and spontaneous than the communion ritual, or at a full meal or some other setting to which it would be difficult to adapt the Lord's Supper.

The Love Feast is most naturally held around a table or with persons seated in a circle; but it is possible to hold it with persons seated in rows. A church sanctuary, fellowship hall, or home is an appropriate location.

One of the advantages of the Love Feast is that any Christian may conduct it. Congregational participation and leadership are usually extensive and important, especially involving children.

¹ This is an adapted version of the resource originally published by the United Methodist Church accessed through their website at <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/the-love-feast>. **Copyright:** "The Love Feast" Copyright © 1992 UMPH.

Testimonies and praise are the focal point in most Love Feasts. Testimonies may include personal witness to God's grace or accounts of what God has been doing in the lives of others. Praise may take the form of hymns, songs, choruses, or spoken exclamations and may vary from the relative formality of an opening and closing hymn to spontaneous calling out of requests and singing as the Spirit moves. Sometimes the leader guides those present alternating spontaneous singing and sharing in free and familiar conversation for as long as the Spirit moves. Wesley counselled that all the above be done decently and in order.

Prayer is vital to a Love Feast. A fixed form of prayer may be used, especially something like the Lord's Prayer or Be present at our table, Lord, that is familiar to the people. Spontaneous prayer requests and prayers may come from the people.

Scripture is also important. There may be scripture readings, or persons may quote Scripture spontaneously as the Spirit moves. There may be a sermon, an exhortation, or an address; but it should be informal and consist of the leader's adding personal witness to what spontaneously comes from the congregation.

Most Love Feasts include the sharing of food. It is customary not to use communion bread, wine, or grape juice because to do so might confuse the Love Feast with the Lord's Supper. The bread may be a loaf of ordinary bread, crackers, rolls, or a sweet bread baked especially for this service. If a loaf of bread, it may be broken in two or more pieces and then passed from hand to hand as each person breaks off a piece. Crackers, rolls, or slices of bread may be passed in a basket. The beverage has usually been water, but other beverages such as lemonade, tea, or coffee have been used. Early Methodists commonly passed a loving cup with two handles from person to person, but later the water was served in individual glasses. The food is served quietly without interrupting the service.

The Love Feast may also be followed by a full meal, in which case persons or families may bring dishes of food for all to share. During the meal there may be informal conversation in Christian fellowship, or the leader may direct the conversation by suggesting matters of mutual concern, or there may be spontaneous witnessing and praise. If there is food left over, it may be taken as an expression of love to persons not present.

OPENING HYMN OR CHORUS

Suggested hymns: English 597 Be known to us in breaking bread; Xhosa 296 Uyindlela yenyano, Sotho 237 Jesu ha u ile, Shona 42 Ngatishandisei nyasha

PRAYERS

*One or more persons may pray aloud, the others responding with **Amen, Hallelujah, Praise the Lord**, or other responses as the Spirit moves, or one of the following or another prayer or table grace may be spoken or sung:*

Be present at our table, Lord;
Be here and everywhere adored;
Thy creatures bless, and grant that we
May feast in paradise with Thee.

(JOHN CENICK)

The following prayer by Charles Wesley was written especially for the Love Feast and recommended for use at all Love Feasts by both John and Charles Wesley. It may be sung to the tune TERRA BEATA (UMH 144).

Father of earth and heaven,
Thy hungry children feed,
Thy grace be to our spirits given,
That true immortal bread.
Grant us and all our race
In Jesus Christ to prove
The sweetness of thy pardoning grace,
The manna of thy love.

SCRIPTURE *Suggested lessons:*

Psalm 145:8–21 (UMH 857)
1 Corinthians 13
2 Corinthians 9:6 –15
Philippians 2:5 –11
1 John 4:7 –21
Matthew 22:34 –40
Luke 9:12 –17
Luke 14:16 –24
John 6:25 –35

God's abounding love
The gift of love
Our generous sharing glorifies God.
God's self-emptying in Christ Jesus
God is love.
Love of God and neighbour
Feeding the five thousand
Parable of the great dinner
Jesus the Bread of Life

Here you can also use the family reflections attached for conversation and sharing.

ADDRESS OR PERSONAL WITNESS TO THE SCRIPTURE

One or more persons may give a personal reflection on the passages read.

²RITUAL OF FOOTWASHING (Optional)

So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet.

For I have set you an example that you also should do as I have done for you.

Call to Prayer

As Jesus prayed to his Father in the shadows of the Garden of Gethsemane, let us pray together now in the shadow of his love.

Prayers of the People

For the leaders of the world, that they may put aside their differences and seek the peace of Christ, we pray,

² This is a section of the Foot Washing Liturgy by Lyn Reith accessed through the Reformed Worship Website at <https://www.reformedworship.org/>

Lord, hear our prayer.

For the Church, that she may become a servant offering hope, life, and compassion to all who seek God's love, we pray.

Lord, hear our prayer.

For all who receive daily bread in welfare lines, food banks, and at this table, that they may forgive our daily trespasses, we pray,

Lord, hear our prayer.

Lord, gather your people around your table, that we who celebrate this sacrament may understand what Christ does for us and follow in his way, we pray,

Lord, hear our prayer.

That we may long for the day when all may feast at the table of our Lord, no one will be an outsider, and all will be loved, we pray,

Lord, hear our prayer.

As our Lord continues to make intercession for us, let us unite in this prayer, remembering those who asked us to pray and those who need our prayers.

[Silent prayer]

PASSING OF THE BREAD

The bread is passed from person to person. Each person may be invited in passing the bread to quote a scripture verse. The leader may receive last and close with a few words, a short prayer, or an invitation to new commitment to Christ and a holy life.

[COLLECTION FOR THE POOR]

All are encouraged to give to the kitty as a reminder of the need to extend God's love shared at the table with those who are in need. This is also a great time to teach the younger members at the table about Jesus' love and care for the poor. Collection can be used to buy food stuff for Martha's Pantry or any other mission close to your heart as a family.

[CIRCULATION OF THE LOVING CUP]

TESTIMONIES, PRAYERS, SINGING

Favourite family hymn(s) can be sung and each member can share of their experience of Lent and whatever prayer items they would like to share. This is also a good time to check in on how the Lockdown has impacted you as a family.

HYMN OR CHORUS

CLOSING PRAYER WITH BLESSING