THE 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.

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 lovefeasts. 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 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.

The Love Feast has often been held on occasions when the celebration of the Lord’s Supper would be inappropriate. The novel coronavirus/COVID-19 global pandemic is such a time. Preventing spread of the virus requires Christians to practice social distancing thus preventing us from gathering as a congregation at the Lord’s Table.

The Love Feast is most naturally held around a table or with persons seated in a circle.

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.

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. John Wesley counseled 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.

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. 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.
A Maundy Thursday Love Feast

OPENING HYMN OR CHORUS

*Play and sing along with a recording of a favorite praise song or hymn.*

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 to OLD 100TH, the DOXOLOGY tune.

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 (“This Is My Father’s World”).*

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.  

Eternal God, in the sharing of a meal  
your Son established a new covenant for all people,  
and in the washing of feet he showed us the dignity of service.  
Grant that by the power of your Holy Spirit  
these signs of our life in faith  
may speak again to our hearts,  
feed our spirits, and refresh our bodies. **Amen.**

SCRIPTURE

*Suggested lessons:*

- Exodus 12:1-14  
- Psalm 116  
- Romans 12:1-21  
- John 13:1-17, 31b-35
PERSONAL WITNESS TO THE SCRIPTURE
One or more persons may give a personal witness to the scripture.
What word, phrase, or image captured your imagination?
What is God up to in these Scriptures for us today?

FOOTWASHING
While footwashing is not a typical part of a Love Feast, this is not a typical Love Feast. Maundy Thursday is the day Jesus modeled his way of love by washing his disciple’s feet. Express Christ’s love for those present by inviting them to participate in this powerful Christian practice.

Have a basin, pitcher, and towel on hand. Place them in front of a chair in the room. Fill the pitcher with warm water. Invite everyone to remove their shoes and socks. One at a time, take a seat in the chair while the person leading the Love Feast gently washes their feet by pouring water from the pitcher over each foot. Then dry the feet with the towel.

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
Give to Feeding America-West Michigan at https://www.feedwm.org/, go to the Trinity website, click Give Now and donate to the Altar Fund, Community Ministries, or fund of your choice.

CIRCULATION OF THE LOVING CUP
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.

TESTIMONIES, PRAYERS, SINGING

HYMN OR CHORUS
Suggested from UMH:
566 Blest Be the Dear Uniting Love
572 Pass It On
557 Blest Be the Tie That Binds
558 We Are the Church
If you do not have a hymnal, play a recording of one or more of the suggested hymns or praise songs you know and sing along. You may find hymns from The United Methodist Hymnal online here. The Faith We Sing is here.
DISMISSAL WITH BLESSING

*The leader may conclude with one of the following:*

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ,
and the love of God,
and fellowship of the Holy Spirit,
be with us all evermore. Amen. 2 Corinthians 13:14

May the God of hope fill us with all joy
and peace in believing through the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen. Romans 15:13

Glory to God whose power, working in us,
can do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine:
Glory to God from generation to generation in the Church,
and in Christ Jesus for ever and ever. Amen. Ephesians 3:20-21