

Love Feast

THE MEANING OF LOVE FEAST

For Brethren, the traditional love feast, held once or twice a year, remains the profound central act and symbol of the church's life. It is as close as "low-church" Brethren get to a high holy time. Based on a literal reading of the New Testament, Brethren have shaped an agape meal or love feast. When Brethren gather for this special meal during Holy Week they are able to see themselves as part of the events of Jesus' final week with the disciples. Whenever the community gathers around the love feast tables they are reminded of the relationship of all disciples to one another and to the Christ they serve.

The love feast begins with a period of examination. Brethren cite Jesus' words in Matthew 5:23-24, calling for reconciliation before offering gifts to God, and Paul's warning in 1 Corinthians 11:27-30 about the dangers of participating in the love feast in a thoughtless fashion. At one time deacons visited each member's home to challenge members to examine whether they remained firm in their covenants with God and brothers and sisters. Today some opportunity for self-examination and prayer remains a vital part of the love feast.

Following this time of examination, participants ponder the powerful meanings in Jesus' washing of the disciples' feet, recorded in John 13. These meanings include God's cleansing and forgiveness, as well as our need to give and receive service. Jesus' command to wash one another's feet is a clear reminder that if we do not live in the spirit of footwashing, we have no part in him. The exchange of an embrace and kiss that usually follows footwashing expresses the Christ love that binds members of the community to one another, recalling the insistence in 1 John 4:7-21 that the love we share with one another validates our knowledge of a God of love.

The love feast meal recalls the meal Jesus shared with his disciples. The unique character of the relationship envisioned for those who are members together in Christ's body is described in John 14-17, and some segment of that text is often used to frame this portion of the service. Christ is the center, the source of the unity. The sharing of food symbolizes the sharing of life and looks toward the messianic banquet of the future. Some congregations choose to eat in silent reflection. Others believe the bonds that bind them to one another are more adequately rehearsed as they talk with one another around the tables, much as they do on other occasions when they eat together as a church family.

Finally, the Brethren share the bread and cup, remembering Christ's supreme gift of life and renewing their commitment to embody Christ and to follow his path of sacrificial love for the world.

After a closing hymn, it is a pattern in many congregations for everyone to join in the necessary chores. Hymnals are returned to the sanctuary, chairs and tables are folded and put away, dishes washed and dried. The sharing of these simple tasks also expresses the covenant that binds members to one another. They become another part of the feast of love.

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GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS

The love feast service is intended for those who have made a personal commitment to Jesus Christ and a community of believers because the service affirms and renews that covenant relationship. It is important for each congregation to be clear about its expectations so there will be no unnecessary embarrassment about who may attend and how they participate.

The congregation's policy regarding the participation of children must be thoughtfully developed and interpreted. Some congregations include children to provide education and training for future involvement and to fully incorporate them into the faith community. Others exclude them or modify their participation to enhance the meaning for adults and to preserve the love feast exclusively for baptized believers.

Though some are concerned to maintain total conformity to a traditional pattern for the love feast, others find that creativity in the framing and interpretation of the various elements intensifies its meaning and power for participants. Some ministers involve committees of lay people in the planning. Themes are chosen, worship centers created, drama and music used. Leadership is shared throughout. As innovations are introduced it is important to consider carefully the biblical foundations from which the service has been drawn and the values that have been central to our Brethren heritage. Planning should be done with respect for the traditions and with attention to the congregational setting. For example, the concept of servanthood may require sensitive handling. Some women and certain racial-ethnic groups bring past experiences that radically affect the way this biblical teaching is experienced. The intent is to enable this particular congregation to reaffirm and renew faith in a way that connects people more meaningfully with Jesus Christ and the community of believers.

Although sanctuaries have many advantages as a setting for worship, few sanctuaries are equipped to accommodate all the facets of the love feast. Congregations will want to consider how best to use their facilities to provide a worshipful atmosphere and preserve the unity of the whole experience.

Consider whether there will be people present whose physical limitations affect their ability to participate fully. Remember the visually impaired in your plan for lighting and the size of print to be used in the bulletin. Try to plan for voice amplification if there are those who have difficulty hearing and provide one skilled in signing if there will be deaf people present. Be sensitive to any adjustments that will avoid embarrassment or awkwardness for those not easily able to kneel to wash feet.

The use of bulletins is optional. The style of the service may dictate the congregation's decision. Clear directions should be given and appropriate materials provided so that all those present may participate fully.

PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Preparation or Examination

A time of preparation normally begins the love feast service. As an alternative, a congregation may provide direction for individual self-examination and penitence, or design a corporate worship experience in a setting prior to the love feast.

Feetwashing

Basins of warm water, along with a towel that can be fastened around the waist and used for drying, should be conveniently placed in preparation for the feetwashing. In addition, there is need for water and towels for washing hands afterward.

At the proper time, designated people wrap towels around their waists and begin to wash the feet of another person. As soon as the washing and drying are complete, the two people who have shared the feetwashing exchange an embrace and/or “holy kiss” or kiss of love (Rom. 16:16; 1 Pet. 5:14). This is often accompanied by simple words of blessing such as “God bless you.” The towel is moved from the one who has served to the one who has been served. Then the one whose feet have been washed proceeds in like manner to wash the feet of the next person and so on until all have participated.

Traditionally, men and women are seated at separate tables. Some congregations are adopting alternative models to allow men and women or families to be seated together. Whatever the seating arrangement, an atmosphere of devotion and reverence will be fostered by a room lighted by candles and the use of either instrumental music or congregational singing. Although some choose to move to separate rooms for feetwashing, this has a tendency to disrupt the flow of the service and break the sense of community.

Fellowship Meal

At one time the menu for the fellowship meal was dictated by tradition; many favored lamb in harmony with Jesus’ sharing of a passover meal with his disciples. Today Brethren do not have uniformity in the food used. Many congregations serve foods that are important to them. Some keep the meal simple enough to minimize the labor or food materials required. Provision should be made for vegetarians and others on special diets.

Communion or Eucharist

For Brethren, “communion” and “eucharist” are alternate terms to refer to the bread and the cup. The elements for the communion are prepared in advance by the deacons or other members of the congregation. The traditional unleavened bread is appropriate. Whole loaves of bread are sometimes used instead. Although earlier generations of Brethren used wine in the eucharist, Brethren today use unfermented grape juice. It may be served in individual cups set at each communicant’s place or in communion trays. In some congregations, the common cup continues to be an important symbol of unity.

SERVICE ONE

This order of service can be used without bulletins. The minister, by transitional statements and by instruction, guides the participants through the service. The hymns may be sung a cappella.

In Preparation

Opening Remarks

MINISTER

The highest and most meaningful experiences in life cannot be expressed in words. If you were asked to define the simple beauty of a lily, what would you say? What would you say if asked to convey to another the splendor of trees that have changed and now appear in the vivid hues of autumn? Who can capture in words the thrill of worship, or the feeling in the heart of a new father and mother as they look at the tiny squalling life with which God has just blessed them? Words help us communicate; still, at times they can be a prison inadequate for the feeling that longs to be expressed.

The great truths of the faith need to be said, but they must not be fenced in by the limitation of words. They demand something more. By dramatically enacting our faith through symbols, we not only confess that they stand for the truth, but by our participation in them, the truth is experienced anew. We meet today, then, not only for a drama that allows us to proclaim our faith, but also for involvement and participation that opens the door for the Holy Spirit to communicate the gospel in fresh and vivid experience.

We begin with a time for self-examination and preparation. The hymn and a time of silence will give us an opportunity to reflect on any obstacle that might stand in the way of communion with God and our brothers and sisters.

Opening Hymn

“Just as I Am, Without One Plea,” no. 516 (verse 1)

A Time of Silence

A Prayer of Preparation

Lord of hosts, preparer of this table; prepare us.

The feast is ready. Make us ready.

We hear the promises of scripture:

To lift the veil of self-righteousness

To destroy the covering of gloom

To shatter the barriers of ignorance.

Enable us to come to this banquet rejoicing,

Knowing we are clothed in forgiveness and mercy

And gifted with the joy of your salvation.

Amen.¹

The Symbol of Service

Scripture

John 13:1-17

Hymn

“When We Walk with the Lord,” *no. 544 (verse 1)*

Remarks Concerning the Feetwashing

MINISTER

Some will say that to wash another’s feet is an outdated act, that the symbol is no longer common in our time. That is true, but we are not seeking to learn a common lesson, rather a deep one. This symbol takes us radically from our own world back to the time of a most important teaching. Only as we relive those moments can that message become contemporary and live with us now.

We must note that the servanthood assumed by Jesus in this drastic act is related to the dedication of his coming. It is eternally bound to the cause for which he came and died. As the bread and cup are symbols of the sacrifice and giving of his life, so the kneeling to wash one another’s feet is the symbol of the purpose and the living of his life.

By demonstrating the servanthood of his life, Christ called all disciples to be servants. He called them from disputes about position to a life position that left no doubt about the intent to serve. We do violence to the heart of this act if we suppose that by stooping to wash another’s feet we rise in status in the kingdom. We do not kneel to demonstrate humility, but to remember the service of the life of Christ, and to let that memory fill us with inspiration and determination. Preparations have been made for us to relive those moments.

Here the minister will give whatever simple instructions are necessary for all to participate comfortably.

Let us with eager, searching hearts do this in remembrance of Jesus, the Christ, that the meaning and message of his act may work its miracle in our lives.

During the service of feetwashing, the participants may sing favorite hymns or appropriate music may be played.

The Symbol of Community

Scripture

John 15:9-17

Remarks Concerning the Meal

MINISTER

Jesus lifted up for us two great commandments. First, that we should love the Lord our God with heart, mind, soul, and strength. And the second, that we should love neighbor

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as self. We are bound by our confession of Christ as Savior and Lord to live the love we receive from God through him in our relationship to everyone.

Love is never future tense. It is never something we do tomorrow. It is either today, or it is nonexistent. Our age cries out for the manifestations of God's love to be experienced in life and relationships.

Whom shall we love? Who is our neighbor? It is easy for us to eat together, and in that act to demonstrate the vision of community. We deceive ourselves when we find it easier to symbolize our unity in Christ across thousands of miles than in the space between houses or the proximity of a person in the next chair. Sometimes those close, whom we know well, are the hardest to love. Jesus ate with those very near to him. He ate knowing Thomas; he ate knowing Peter; he ate knowing Judas.

Eating this meal is a deep fellowship. It is an intimate thing. What we do in these moments is to share in our relationship in Christ even in the midst of our brokenness. We recall that through Christ, God's love reached out to make us acceptable. We remember that through Christ, God's love makes us acceptable to one another and empowers us to be in community, beginning in this room and extending to the far reaches of the world.

(name) will lead us in the prayer of thanksgiving for the meal, after which we will relive this demonstration of community.

Prayer of Thanksgiving

O God, when Jesus was in this world, he ate and drank with sinners and outcasts, welcoming them, enjoying them. For the hungry, Jesus was food and the people ate and were full.

O God, as we eat, we eat the bread of fellowship and are sufficiently fed. But we pray that you make out of us something of nourishment. As we eat together, enable us to be bread for our sisters and brothers who are starved for gladness and hope. And may we, by feeding them, be ourselves made full of rejoicing. Amen.²

The Fellowship Meal

Hymn

"Bless'd Be the Tie That Binds," no. 421 (verse 1)

The Symbol of Redemption

Scripture

Isaiah 53:1-6

Remarks Concerning the Bread and the Cup

MINISTER

There is a prayer that goes something like this: “Most merciful God, Thou who dost treat everyone as if all were one, and each one as if there were only one. . .” It is with this kind of grand paradox that we come to this table to share the bread and the cup. Though we are here together, there is a sense in which we are here alone. What Christ did, he did for all; still, he did it for each one. Neither the blame for the crucifixion nor the grace that comes through it is a nebulous thing. They touch each one, all of us, personally. Therefore we cannot be general or evasive in breaking this bread or drinking of this cup. It is not a symbolic act that we do for someone else.

“This is my body broken for you.”

“This is my blood poured out for you.”

To eat this bread and to drink of this cup allows us to be in the multitude that bathes in the wideness of God’s mercy. But it also brings us to a “wonderful and painful” aloneness with God. Despite all preparation, none of us comes to this moment worthy. We ask: “Lord, is it I?” And we know the answer.

But there is power here to make us whole. . . to mend brokenness, to fill emptiness before God, when all of God’s love through Jesus Christ spills into life with a drama beyond words. Indeed, in these moments the miracle of being new creatures in Christ becomes reality again.

Hymn

“When I Survey the Wondrous Cross,” no. 259 (verse 1)

The Invitation

MINISTER

All who are in love and community with your brothers and sisters, who do truly and earnestly repent of your sins, who humbly put your trust in Christ and desire his help that you may lead a holy life, draw nigh to God and receive these sacred symbols to your comfort, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Scripture

1 Corinthians 11:23-24

Prayer of Blessing

We share the bread of remembrance; with joy we eat and remember Christ’s body broken for us, the grief of our sin turned to the joy of divine forgiveness.³

Declaration of Faith

I invite you to join me in a declaration of faith as we prepare to break the bread.

“The bread which we break is the communion of the body of Christ.”

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Partaking of the Bread

Scripture

1 Corinthians 11:25-26

Prayer of Blessing

We share the cup of remembrance; with joy we drink and remember Christ's blood poured out for us, the anguish of separation from God turned to the joy of restoration.⁴

Declaration of Faith

I invite you to join me in a declaration of faith as we prepare to partake of the cup.

"The cup which we bless is the communion of the blood of Christ."

The Drinking of the Cup

Moments of Silent Meditation

Closing Prayer

**Almighty and loving God,
we thank you that through your great love
you have fed us from our Lord's table,
and have assured us that your goodness to us
never fails.**

**We give you thanks that we are members of the
body of Christ, heirs with Christ, and
brothers and sisters in your family.**

**By your grace assist us in our pilgrimage that
we may go forth strong and faithful in our
witness,
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.⁵**

Doxology

Benediction

**Go now:
Go in safety,
for you cannot go where God is not.
Go in love,
for love alone endures.
Go with purpose,
and God will honor your dedication.
Go in peace,
for it is the gift of God to those whose
hearts and minds are in Christ Jesus. Amen.**

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SERVICE TWO⁶

This celebration is set in terms of a dialog between a pastor or an older member of the congregation and a young person or newly baptized member. It would be helpful to have people who are considering baptism attend as observers.

Have the congregation seated around the tables. The two people in dialog may sit on stools facing each other during the dialog pieces, but take seats with the rest of the congregation during footwashing and the fellowship meal.

Prelude

“I Wonder as I Wander”

Call to Worship

“Brethren, We Have Met to Worship,” no. 8

Invocation

Almighty and loving God,

**All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to you;
and all the families of the nations shall worship before you. For dominion belongs to the LORD, and God rules over the nations. Yes, to you shall all the proud of the earth bow down; before you shall bow all who go down to dust, and those who cannot keep themselves alive.**

**Posterity shall serve you;
we shall tell of our Lord to the coming
generation, and proclaim your deliverance to
a people yet unborn. . . .**

**This we pray in the name of the one who
bought our deliverance through sorrow and
pain, Jesus Christ. Amen.**

adapted from Psalm 22:27-31

Opening Words

YOUTH

(Sister/Brother), why is this night different from all other nights? Why is eating such a central part of our worship tonight? At other times of evening worship we eat a carry-in meal before or after the service. And why are we so quiet as we eat?

PASTOR

Tonight we remember the meal Jesus ate with his disciples on the night before his death. We also celebrate the community created in the Christ event. Our silence and hushed whispers are in reverence for this powerful story and its meaning for our lives.

In 1 Peter 2:10 we read: “Once you were not a people, but now you are God’s people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.” Through Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection, he has created a new community of the saved. Through our baptism we have passed from death to life and have become part of that community.

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Examination and Confession

Remembering Who We Are and Who We Have Been

YOUTH

(Sister/Brother), why do we take time to examine our hearts and confess our sins before we eat? Normally we only offer a prayer to thank God for the food or sing a favorite table grace before eating. Why must we take so much more time tonight?

PASTOR

The meal we share tonight is held in honor of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is a celebration of the gathered faith community, so we need to examine our hearts to make sure we are in proper relationship with God and our brothers and sisters. If those relationships are broken, it is time to repair them.

Our brother Paul warned us not to eat this meal in an unworthy manner. He said we would bring judgment upon ourselves if we did (*1 Cor. 11:27-32*). Our eating together is an act of worship. Jesus says that we must be in right relationship with one another before we can offer our worship to God. In Matthew 5:23-24 Jesus says. . .

FIRST READER

Matthew 5:23-24

PASTOR

God's reconciliation with us becomes part of our life with others in the body of Christ. Once upon a time, the elders and deacons of the church would visit each household in the weeks before love feast. They would ask each member three questions:

- 1) Are you still in the faith of the gospel as you declared at your baptism?**
- 2) Are you, as far as you know, in peace and union with the church?**
- 3) Will you still labor with the Brethren for an increase of holiness both in yourselves and others?**

We no longer make these visits, but we take time to examine our lives and to confess so we can be reconciled to God and to each other. Then we can share this meal together as one body.

Let us now examine ourselves and discover if there is anything that would prevent us from eating together. If you are moved to share a confession with the community, please feel free to do so.

Silent Meditation

Responsive Reading

ONE

**Have mercy on me, O God,
according to your steadfast love;**

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**according to your abundant mercy
blot out my transgressions.**

ALL

Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity,
and cleanse me from my sin.
For I know my transgressions,
and my sin is ever before me.

ONE

**Create in me a clean heart, O God,
and put a new and right spirit within me.
Do not cast me away from your presence,
And do not take your holy spirit from me.
Restore to me the joy of your salvation,
and sustain in me a willing spirit.**

ALL

Then I will teach transgressors your ways,
and sinners will return to you.
Deliver me from bloodshed, O God,
O God of my salvation,
and my tongue will sing aloud of your
deliverance.

ONE

**O Lord, open my lips,
and my mouth will declare your praise.
For you have no delight in sacrifice;
if I were to give a burnt offering,
you would not be pleased.**

ALL

The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit;
a broken and contrite heart,
O God, you will not despise.
Psalms 51:1-3, 10-17

Assurance of Forgiveness

PASTOR

**If we confess our sins, God is just, and may be trusted to forgive our sins and cleanse us
from every kind of wrong.**
adapted from 1 John 1:9

Washing Feet

Remembering Jesus Our Servant

YOUTH

(Sister/Brother), why do we wash each other's feet before this meal? Before other meals we wash only our hands, and maybe our faces. Besides, I already had to wash before I came. Aren't we clean enough? And why all the hugging and kissing afterward?

PASTOR

Our brother Peter asked questions too when Jesus bent down to wash his feet. You are right in assuming that washing feet has something to do with getting clean. Yet the main reason we wash each other's feet is that Jesus commanded us to do this. Let us listen to the story of Jesus washing the disciples' feet. It may help us understand.

SECOND READER

John 13:1-17

PASTOR

There is a cleansing element in footwashing that in some ways is related to the cleansing we receive at baptism. In footwashing we are symbolically washed of our sin without having to be repeatedly baptized. Most of us washed before we came tonight. Yet I need you to wash my feet. I need you to help me in my Christian walk. We need each other.

I also need to wash your feet. Jesus, through his example and commandment, teaches us to serve one another as humble servants. In Jesus' day, washing feet was an act of hospitality performed by a servant. After a long journey traveling on dusty roads in sandaled feet, washing feet was a welcome act of kindness. It was unheard of for a rabbi of Jesus' stature to bend down and wash his disciples' feet. Through this act, Jesus taught that we are all brothers and sisters in his community and that leaders are servants of all. And as Christians we need not only to serve each other but also to wash the feet of the poor and homeless of the world.

Why do we kiss and hug? To show our affection for each other as sisters and brothers in Christ. We often call this the holy kiss. In several of his letters, Paul tells us to kiss one another in greeting.

Let us now participate in the ordinance of footwashing. As we begin, let us sing "When We Walk with the Lord." Then we will choose other hymns to sing while we wash feet.

Hymn

"When We Walk with the Lord," *no. 544*

The Washing of Feet

The Fellowship Meal

Remembering Jesus Our Brother

YOUTH

(Sister/Brother), why do we eat such simple food at this meal? Why don't we have more food and more variety? We don't even get dessert.

PASTOR

Our fellowship meal tonight is largely symbolic. Eating together is one of our most common human experiences. When we eat together, we nourish our physical bodies, and we also nurture our relationships. We remember especially the last meal Jesus shared with his disciples. We remember that the early church shared more than just food. They held all things in common.

We also look forward to the end of time when we will share this meal with Christ and the cloud of witnesses from all ages. Then there will be no hunger, pain, or death, and Christ shall wipe the tears from our eyes. Even strangers and sojourners will be welcome at this great banquet.

Tonight we eat a simple meal, keeping our minds on these things, rather than on the food itself. We eat this meal tonight to share with each other in love and fellowship. On the night of his last meal, Jesus gave us the commandment to love one another. We find this written in John's Gospel.

THIRD READER

John 15:9-17

Hymn

"Here in Our Upper Room," *no. 450*

Prayer

Eating Together

Communion

Remembering Jesus Our Savior

YOUTH

(Sister/Brother), why do we eat this strange bread and drink these little glasses of grape juice? We have already eaten a symbolic meal together.

PASTOR

Yes, we have eaten together, but now we remember a special part of that last supper Jesus shared with his disciples. We remember that Jesus blessed and broke bread and blessed the cup and shared it that night. It is likely that Jesus broke unleavened bread, bread without the yeast to make it rise. This bread recalls God's liberating action in Egypt on another night long ago.

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The bread and cup remind us of Christ's liberating action through suffering and death on the cross. This he did for our salvation. The prophet Isaiah describes the work of Christ as the suffering servant.

FOURTH READER

Isaiah 53

PASTOR

The bread and cup are one of the most universal symbols in Christianity. Paul told the Christians at Corinth how Jesus instituted the ordinance of the bread and cup. Listen to his words.

FIFTH READER

1 Corinthians 11:23-26

Hymn

"Beneath the Cross of Jesus," *no. 250*

Invitation

PASTOR

We have heard Christ's call to remembrance. Now I invite you to share the bread and the cup. All who are in love and community with your brothers and sisters, who do truly and earnestly repent of your sins, who humbly put your trust in Christ and desire his help that you may lead a holy life, draw near to God and receive these sacred emblems to your comfort, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

The Bread

PASTOR

Jesus took bread and broke it saying, "This is my body which is given for you."

Let us pray.

Gracious Lord, we thank you for the grain that grows in many fields, but comes together and is ground into flour to make this bread. We come from many places and work at different jobs, yet tonight we are gathered as your body. We remember your broken body on the cross of Calvary. We gather in thanksgiving for that event, as painful as it was. Please bless this bread broken in memory of you. Amen.

Let us speak together the words of faith: "The bread which we break is the communion of the body of Christ."

The Cup

PASTOR

Jesus took the cup saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood."

Let us pray.

Loving Lord, we thank you for grapes that have been gathered and crushed to make this juice. Bring us together in the unity of your spirit. We remember the blood you shed for us and thank you for the new covenant it has sealed between us and God. Bless this cup we drink in your name. Amen.

Let us speak together the words of faith: “The cup which we bless is the communion of the blood of Christ.”

Let us pray.

Thank you, Lord, for this time to gather as your people and celebrate the love feast. May our experience this evening help us remember your life, death, and resurrection. Life has conquered death. Alleluia!

Keep us mindful of the community you have created among us. May our sharing become more than a symbol around these tables; may it be lived out in our life together. We pray in the name of the one who through death taught us how to live, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Closing

YOUTH

(Sister/Brother), thank you for answering my questions. Many times older folks respond to questions by saying, “We have always done it that way.” You have taken me back to the roots of our faith. What we have done tonight is more than simply copying Jesus’ last meal before he died. But I admit it is still pretty hard to understand it all.

PASTOR

We who have moved through this service many times still discover new truths in it. What we have acted out together in this love feast is basic to living a Christian life: confession, repentance, reconciliation, cleansing, service, fellowship, self-giving love, and hope. In this sense, love feast doesn’t really end, even after the tables have been cleared, the wash tubs and dishes put away. I’m glad you asked your questions. You have helped remind me how important it is to share our faith story with others.

And now to end our feast of love, we will form a circle around the room to sing a hymn that testifies to the love in Christ that binds us to each other.

Hymn

“Bless’d Be the Tie That Binds,” no. 421

Benediction

Now may the Lord Jesus bless your soul, and strengthen your faith, and let this simple instruction grow within you and bear fruit which will remain for life eternal. We will together praise and glorify our God forever. And all the people said: “Amen!”

SERVICE THREE⁸

Create a worship setting focusing on two basins: a foot tub and a hand basin.

Meditation and Examination

MINISTER

Washing, cleansing, getting rid of soil and contamination. It is a simple act, an expected part of our life from the day we are born. Yet the use of cleansing water carries a deeper meaning as well. Peoples of many cultural and faith traditions include washing as part of religious ritual.

Tonight the hand basin and foot tub before us recall two familiar New Testament stories. Listen to part of these stories.

Scripture

Matthew 27:24, John 13:5

MINISTER

Two very different people, Pilate and Jesus, each took water and began to wash. What do these two represent? Who was made clean? How does our own need for cleansing relate? In a time of silence, let us reflect on these questions.

Moments of silence should be observed according to the congregation's ability to appreciate and use a time of meditation. Then the minister may say:

We, like Pilate, and like those twelve we call disciples, need to be cleansed. We were once washed in the waters of baptism—and knew the beautiful clean feeling of new life in Jesus Christ. And yet we are here knowing the sad reality that it is impossible to stay clean. We come to be cleansed anew. And we come rejoicing in the knowledge that cleansing is available. Paul reminds us of the critical nature of our need.

Scripture

1 Corinthians 11:27-32

Prayer of Confession

MINISTER

Gracious God, hear us now as in silence we voice to you our confessions.

Following a time of silent prayer, the minister may conclude with the following prayer of confession:

Grant, O God, that we might be enveloped with the peace that accompanies the assurance of your forgiving love. Sweep from us the pain of all that we regret, and awaken us to the activity of your renewing spirit. We are grateful for the confidence that even as we are judged by your holiness we are also forgiven by your grace. Sharpen our attention to your presence with us as we engage together in the drama of faith. In the name of Christ we pray. Amen.

Hymn of Petition

“Breathe upon Us, Holy Spirit,” *no. 28*

The Service of Footwashing

MINISTER

We remember how Pilate took water and tried his best to accomplish what none of us can do for ourselves. As we take basins and water tonight, we remember that in a startling action long ago Jesus knelt and demonstrated for the disciples in that time and for later times a new way to become clean.

Scripture

John 13:1-17

MINISTER

We cannot cleanse ourselves. However, as we kneel to wash one another's feet, we extend God's cleansing grace to one another. In our giving and receiving, God's cleansing love is made manifest.

The Washing of Feet

Commitment to Community

MINISTER

Pilate tried to wash his hands of the responsibility for the life of another human being. We do not have the legal power Pilate did to impose a death sentence. Yet each one of us is bonded with many others in a complex web of relationships that begins at home and extends around the globe. Our actions contribute either to life or to death for others with whom we are inextricably linked. Quite honestly, there are times we would like to simply wash our hands of any responsibility for, or any connection with, the enormous complexities of pain, injustice, and need in the world. Sometimes the same is true even in the church.

As we have washed one another's feet and expressed our affection with an embracing warmth, we have symbolized our intention to live by a different standard: to care about and for other people, to value their salvation as well as our own.

This connectedness, this love we proclaim, is an inseparable part of what it means to know and love God.

The Agape Meal

Scripture

1 John 4:7-9,18-20

MINISTER

In many cultures, sharing food symbolizes a promise to seek only the best for those at the table. It is the seal on a covenant of relationship. Reflecting on all the gifts and demands of love in this community and others to which we belong, let us pray God's blessing on this shared meal.

Prayer of Blessing for the Meal

Loving God, remind us of what it means to invest ourselves in the lives of one another as we live in community here. Impress us again with the sacred nature of the ties that connect us to each other and to an unending circle of people throughout the world. Sharpen our vision of the action that love implies. Bring to our lips words that carry life and hope. As the food nourishes and renews us, may we also experience a revived commitment to life shaped by inseparable linkage with all our brothers and sisters. We pray in the name of the Christ to whom we can only be joined as we are joined to others. Amen.

The Fellowship Meal

The Service of Communion

MINISTER

In Gethsemane, Jesus struggled against what he saw on the path ahead. And yet the one who was Christ could never wash his hands of responsibility. The one who had chosen the foot basin of service would set no limit on self-giving love.

Scripture

Luke 23:32-38,44-47

Hymn of Praise and Faith

"I Know Not Why God's Wondrous Grace," no. 338

The Bread

MINISTER

Through the symbol of the bread we remember Christ's body surrendered in death. We also symbolize our faith family, the church, the body of Christ, ready to give itself to bring life to others.

Tonight we break our bread from long strips, in a custom of earlier times, remembering we are each a part of a larger whole, a body of faith through which we are to know and proclaim Christ's body, Christ's style of life for others.

Let us ask God's blessing for the bread.

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Holy God, alert us to the full impact of what we do here. May we see in our minds the vivid reality of one who was faithful all the way to a cross so that we might live. O God, may we not eat this bread lightly. As we eat, may we commit ourselves anew to being part of the Christ body, giving itself in obedience and love. Amen.

MINISTER

In Luke we read, “Jesus took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them saying, ‘This is my body which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.’”

After the distribution of the bread, the minister may lead the congregation in the unison affirmation.

Unison Affirmation

The bread which we break is the communion of the body of Christ.

The worshipers may eat the bread.

The Cup

MINISTER

Blood is equivalent to life. The cup symbolizes the total surrender and pouring out of the Christ life in his death. It reminds us of how he lived and died, pouring himself out for all. In that love and that death, followed by resurrection, we receive the promise that beyond all that happens to us in this death-filled world, we can know a life and hope that nothing can destroy. All this is held within the cup.

In a prayer of faith, let us express our thanksgiving.

Generous God, through Christ you have revealed the totality of your love for us all. There seems no way to express our gratitude. Grant that we might live our thanksgiving in joyous recognition of cleansing received and resurrection begun. May we not move through this act in dulled habit, but rather in enlivened awareness of the ongoing Christ life in us. Revive our faith and our courage that we too may pour ourselves out for the sake of all who continue to be lost and broken by life. Extend your realm through us, we pray. Amen.

MINISTER

Luke reports these words of Jesus: “This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood.”

After distribution of the cup, the minister may lead the congregation in the unison affirmation.

Unison Affirmation

The cup which we bless is the communion of the blood of Christ.

The worshipers may drink of the cup.

Sending Out

MINISTER

The service isn't over; it is only beginning. What we have been about here is not a series of holy acts, separate from life. Rather these acts have been a reminder that we belong to Christ always and everywhere. We carry the Christ spirit into our homes, our daily activity, all our relationships. We are Christ's people. By God's grace let it be so.

Hymn of Commissioning for Life

"Fill Us with Your Love," *Brethren Songbook*, no. 72

Benediction

MINISTER

Now may the Christ spirit dwell in you richly and fill you with joy and peace in believing and serving, according to the command of the eternal God, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit, now and forever. Amen.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Preparation

The time we are about to share is sacred time, time set apart for a holy purpose. It is a time for remembering. It is a time for renewal of faith. It is a time for strengthening our commitments to Christ and the church. It is not a time to be entered into casually.

Let us remember that we all come to the Lord's table as sinners. None of us is here because we deserve to be; we are all here because God has forgiven our sins and invited us here. Let us pause to confess our sin and thank God for our forgiveness.⁹

Litany of Preparation and Self-Examination

ALL

When it was evening, he came with the twelve. And when they had taken their places and were eating, Jesus, said, "Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me, one who is eating with me.

They began to be distressed and to say to him one after another, "Surely, not I?"

Mark 14:17-18

ONE

Lord, we confess that we who call ourselves your children sometimes betray you. Some of us are unwilling to see those around us who are hurting.

ALL

Lord, is it I?

ONE

Some of us run after the things of this world rather than the things of your kingdom.

ALL

Lord, is it I?

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ONE

Some of us insist on our own way, unwilling to listen and discuss openly with our brothers and sisters who have different opinions.

ALL

Lord, is it I?

ONE

Some of us have neglected opportunities you have given us to be your witnesses.

ALL

Lord, is it I?

ONE

Some of us have failed to use the gifts and talents that you have given us to serve your church.

ALL

Lord, is it I?

ONE

Some of us have not kept a place in our busy daily schedules to be with you in prayer, Bible reading, and meditation.

ALL

Lord, is it I?

ONE

Some of us have said and done things to hurt others, and have not worked to heal the brokenness.

ALL

Lord, is it I?

ONE

All of us have failed in many times and ways to be your people, your church.

ALL

Forgive us, Lord.

ONE

All of us need cleansing, renewal, a fresh anointing of your Holy Spirit.

ALL

Help us to put you first, Lord! Empower us to be your church: serving, loving, forgiving, healing, witnessing, praising, rejoicing in you!¹⁰

Responsive Reading for Love Feast

ONE

Some call this event “love feast.” And so it is! The feast of love, the agape meal—celebrating the love of Christ Jesus for us and the bond of Christian love that unites us as brothers and sisters.

ALL

Some call it “communion.” And so it is! Communion suggests intimate fellowship. This evening celebrates our fellowship as brothers and sisters in Christ. But even more, it is holy communion, offering us friendship and fellowship with God.

ONE

Some refer to it as the “eucharist.” And so it is! Eucharist comes from a Greek word suggesting thanksgiving. It is with hearts overflowing with thanksgiving to God that we gather here this evening.

ALL

Some refer to it as a “sacrament.” And so it is! A sacrament is “an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace.” It is a rich blessing for us to be able to share once again in these sacred events.

ONE

Some call it a “memorial.” And so it is! We gather and share in this special service in memory of our Lord Jesus Christ. Paul said, “Whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death till he comes.” Lord Jesus, we remember and worship you!

ALL

Some refer to it as an “ordinance.” And so it is! An ordinance is a practice recommended or ordained in scripture. Jesus said, “Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.” Our coming here tonight is an act of loving obedience to Christ.

ONE

Whatever we call tonight’s service, it is a special time! It is an opportunity to celebrate our faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the light of the world, the head of the church, our savior, brother, and friend. May God richly bless us in our time together in Christ’s name.¹¹

Prayer for Footwashing

Eternal Creator and Loving God,
In the act of kneeling to wash one another’s feet,
may we kneel also in our hearts
so that our lives may bow in service
to your will and not our own.

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In allowing our feet to be washed,
may our lives be cleansed with your forgiveness
so that we may go forth
freed from the bonds of guilt and despair
to live in freedom and hope.

O Lord,
In our washing of feet,
cleanse our relationships with one another as well.

May we, in washing one another's feet,
forgive and accept forgiveness from one another
for any hurts or wrongs or misunderstandings
that have passed between us,
so that we may rise to sit together at your table
in a renewed and strengthened fellowship in your
love. Amen.¹³

Meditation for the Meal

Jesus says . . . "Take and eat . . ."
Calling us to share in his life.
An invitation to intimacy, to love, to communion.

Jesus says . . . "My burden is light . . ."
Calling us to the journey of discipleship.
An invitation to follow, to learn, to grow.

Jesus says . . . "Even unto the least of these . . ."
Calling us to compassion.
An invitation to do justice, to walk the way of
peace.

Jesus says . . . "Like a mustard seed . . ."
Calling us to look for the kingdom.
An invitation to experience God in our midst,
here in this moment.¹⁴

Meditation and Prayer for the Meal

Our Lord Jesus Christ ate many meals while on the earth,
meals as a boy with his parents in their home at Nazareth,
the Passover meal at the age of twelve in Jerusalem,
meals with the disciples in cities and in the countryside,
meals with Mary, Martha, and Lazarus at their home in Bethany.

Sometimes he ate with publicans and sinners,
and one time he blessed the food on the hillside with five thousand people.
None of these, however, was like the meal he ate with the disciples in the upper room.

We, too, eat many meals,
more than a thousand a year,
at home and away,
alone and with others,
routinely as well as celebratively,
on the run and at our leisure,
out of brown lunch bags and tin lunch boxes and
picnic baskets,
at banquet tables and lunch counters,
holiday meals, business luncheons, and family
gatherings,
at McDonald's, school and factory cafeterias,
and vending machines,
at good restaurants, on airplanes, and in hospital
rooms.

None of them, however, is like the one Jesus ate
with the disciples in the upper room.
And none of them is like the meal we are about to
eat together here.

Here we eat and are nourished in body and in
spirit, as we remember Jesus' ministry and as
we recall his relationship with the disciples.

Let us pray.

Lord Jesus Christ,
we accept your love, the bounty of your provision,
the depth of your mercy and grace.

We remember others:
the world's hungry, the poor, oppressed and lonely,
those who have neither human family nor
church family,
and we are sad.

Help us to eat and share together,
in humility and gratitude,
in rededication and commitment.

We pray in your name. Amen.¹⁵

THEMES FOR DESIGNING LOVE FEAST

There are many opportunities for creativity in designing love feast. Building a service around a theme allows for fresh materials in homilies, bringing new meaning to a familiar pattern of worship. Try the following alternatives or create your own:

The Homecoming of the Prodigal

A Time of Reflection—Luke 15:18-20a

Preparation for the Feast—Luke 15:20b-22

A Supper of Love—Luke 15:23-24

Participation in Life and Death—Luke 15:31

Increasing in Knowledge

Knowing Ourselves—Examination

Knowing Our Need—Washing Feet

Knowing Our Brothers and Sisters—Agape Meal

Knowing Our Lord—Eucharist

Heirs of the Promise

Preparation for the Promise—John 14:15-17

The Promised Forgiveness—John 4:7-15

The Promised Community—John 15:5-17

The Promised Presence—John 6:47-58

Called by God

Called To Be Ready—John 13:1,33-38

Called To Be Servants—John 13:2-17

Called To Be Brothers and Sisters—John 15:9-17

Called To Be Christ's Body—John 16:20-28

We Would See Jesus

Jesus the Living Water

Jesus the Servant

Jesus the True Vine

Jesus the Bread of Life

Called into Shalom

The Shalom of Confession—Romans 5:1, 2

The Shalom of the Foot Tub—Hebrews 12:14-15

The Shalom of the People of Faith—Colossians 3:15

The Shalom of Communion—Colossians 1:19-23

Called To Be Servant Leaders

The Model for Servant Leaders—Feetwashing

The Fellowship of Servant Leaders—Meal

The Inspiration for Servant Leaders—Bread and Cup

The Mission for Servant Leaders—Commissioning

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A Festival of Mission

Moments of Preparation for Mission
God's Mission to Us—the Communion
Our Mission to Each Other—the Meal
Our Mission to the World—the Feetwashing

God So Loved the World

A World-Encompassing Service—
the Act of Feetwashing
A World-Encompassing Fellowship—
the Act of Eating Together
A World-Encompassing Faith—
the Act of Communion
A World-Encompassing Mission—
the Act of Going

ENDNOTES

1. Judith G. Kipp
2. Kipp
3. Larry M. Dentler
4. Dentler
5. Dentler
6. Thomas M. Wagner
8. Joan George Deeter
9. James Benedict
10. Dentler
11. Larry M. Dentler, William L. Gould
13. Elli Elliott
14. Mark Flora Swick
15. J. Stanley Earhart