

A foundation of footwashing

Southeastern event heals the present with tradition of the past

by Dora Smith-Cook

Earlier this year, some members of Southeastern District gathered for a fellowship rally at John and Barbara Smith's picnic shed in western North Carolina. The shed sits on property inherited by Barbara—a small piece of the land settled by the Henry Masters family approximately 200 years ago, and handed down through generations.

The day included a message shared by John—pastor of Pleasant Grove Church of the Brethren in Bakersville, N.C.—followed by lunch at the picnic shed, then a short trip back down Bee Branch Road to the cemetery. Guests visited the gravestones of ancestors who founded the Masters settlement on Bee Branch, and learned more about the history of the first Church of the Brethren that was started there.

Then, below the cemetery, John and Barbara prepared a love feast and footwashing service at the barn where the community held its first love feast more than a century ago.

As people made their way back down the hill to the barn, they gathered around a fire where water for the service was being heated. John shared a prayer and a time of silent introspection. Then everyone moved inside the barn to wash feet and share communion.


People who have been just as dedicated to their faith communities as Barbara and John are to their own passed dishes across the uneven straw, washed each other's tired feet, and shared the bread and cup. The singing voices of these brothers and sisters, who have been through a tumultuous season of conflict and division together, reverber-

WORLD COMMUNION SUNDAY

Many congregations in the Church of the Brethren celebrate love feast as part of the international observance of World Communion Sunday, established to promote "Christian unity and ecumenical cooperation." It is held annually on the first Sunday of October.

ated off the walls of the old barn. Some of the children attending the rally participated in the service. Others, who were too young to sit still, peeled off their shoes and socks and splashed in the little branch next to the barn.

Inside the barn, the building's stone foundation sat like a monument. Each stone had surely shifted slightly over decades, edging left or right, up or down, with the change of seasons. And yet, the barn stands today. The foundation holds. Much like the tradition of love feast itself, which brought these people together on a warm spring Saturday and was first held in this very spot decades ago, a firm foundation can transcend time and conflict.

Those attending the rally are continuing to move forward, with Christ and their love for one another as their foundation. 

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