

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 community enjoyed by the family of Christ.

*Although its origins in the early church are closely interconnected with the origins of Holy Communion, **the two should not be confused with each other.** Holy Communion has been practically universal among Christians throughout church history, whereas the Love Feast has appeared only at certain times and among a few branches of the Christian family tree.*

The modern history of the Love Feast began in Germany with the Moravians (with whom the Episcopal Church is in full communion) in the early 1700s. John Wesley, founder of Methodism and an Anglican priest, experienced the Love Feast among the Moravians during his time in Georgia, and it quickly became part of early American Methodism.

The Love Feast has often been held when celebrations of Holy Communion are not appropriate, or in our case in these days, impossible. The Episcopal Church includes the rite Agape for Maundy Thursday in the Book of Occasional Services. A great advantage of the rite is that any Christian may conduct it, and children are easily incorporated as participants.

The components may include:

Song—a Zoom gathering might include somebody who can sing a hymn/song or play an instrument; if so, great.

Testimony—this is an opportunity to check-in with one another, and to express praise to God, as well as regard for one another and the wider community.

Scripture—a reading from Scripture, with or without reflection, is an essential part of the Love Feast.

Prayer—familiar prayers, such as the *Lord's Prayer* or *Be Present at our Table Lord* are a common feature. Prayer requests and prayers from the people are encouraged.

Food—In our settings, via Zoom and in our homes, we'll use whatever we have on hand to express our Christian fellowship and friendship.

Song—a Zoom gathering might include somebody who can sing a hymn/song or play an instrument; if so, great.

An Order for a Love Feast

Music

Testimony

The leader(s) introduces the time and shares something about their life just now. Mutual invitation, and the option to “pass” is a good method to employ. The leader can suggest that we avoid cross-talking, questioning, or debating. People simply share their truth, and then invite another person to do likewise.

Scripture

Any scripture passage can be read, including lessons appointed for the upcoming Sunday, or for Weekdays in Lent or Easter. Anybody may give a personal witness or reflection after the Scripture is read. Moravians would suggest one of the following as especially suitable for a Love Feast:

God’s abounding love, **Psalm 145: 8-21 (Book of Common Prayer, p. 802)**

The gift of love, **1 Corinthians 13**

Our generous sharing glorifies God, **2 Corinthians 9:6-15**

God’s self-emptying in Christ Jesus, **Philippians 2:5-11**

God is love, **1 John 4:7-21**

Love of God and neighbor, **Matthew 22:34-40**

Feeding the five thousand, **Luke 9:12-17**

Parable of the great dinner, **Luke 14:16-24**

Jesus the bread of life, **John 6:25-35**

Prayer

Intercessions and thanksgivings are offered. The leader may say additional prayers extemporaneously or various ones from the Prayer Book. All may say the Lord’s Prayer or this:

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

Sharing the Feast

All share the food that is before them. The leader may close with a few words, a short prayer, or an invitation to new commitment to Christ through continued support of the local community. When possible, people are encouraged to make financial contributions to support the church and the community.

Music and Dismissal

This rite has been created to use online for the Episcopal Church in Maine during a time of international pandemic, Spring 2020. Sources used include: the Lombard Mennonite Peace Center, <https://lmpeacecenter.org>; <https://www.moravian.org/2018/11/the-lovefeast/>; *The Book of Occasional Services 2003*; *The United Methodist Book of Worship*.