

A METHODIST LOVEFEAST

Introduction

The Love Feast, or Agape, is a Christian fellowship meal recalling the meals Jesus shared with disciples during his ministry. The service expresses the *koinonia* or sharing, belonging and fellowship enjoyed within the body of Christ.

The Love Feast, in common with other acts of worship includes prayer, praise, scripture, preaching and mutual fellowship and an offering, but in addition the Love Feast contains a time of Prepared Testimony and the sharing of the Love Feast cake and the Loving Cup. If preferred, individual glasses or cups may be used.

Preparation

Although Love Feasts can be celebrated in churches with rows of seating, they are generally more suited to an informal worship space, or a hall or home where the participants can face one another around a table or square of tables.

Love Feasts often follow a fairly simple supper, lunch or tea-time meal at which normal conversation has taken place.

The plate of Love Feast Cake (each portion about 2 or 3 cm square) and the Loving Cup (or jug of water, if individual glasses or cups are to be used) are covered until they are required and are placed near the one leading the celebration (who may be lay or ordained).

A Suggested Order for a Love Feast

- 1 A hymn such as 'All praise to our redeeming Lord' (StF 608) or 'Jesus, lover of my soul' (StF 355) or several worship songs
- 2 A prayer rejoicing in God's presence and the gift of salvation in Christ and seeking the blessing of the Holy Spirit
- 3 Previously prepared testimony is shared
- 4 A Bible reading such as
Isaiah 55:1-3; Isaiah 55:6-11; Romans 5:1-5; 1 Corinthians 13; Ephesians 3:14-19;
Philippians 2:1-11; 1 John 4:7-21; Matthew 22:34-40; Revelation 19:6-9
- 5 A short sermon may be preached.
- 6 A hymn is sung, such as Charles Wesley's verses for the Love Feast, 'Come, and let us sweetly join' (StF 646 or as below) and during the singing a collection is made for those in need.

Charles Wesley wrote only one specific hymn for the Love-feast, *Come, and let us sweetly join*, (Hymns and Sacred Poems, 1740). There were 22 eight line verses in the original! Verses from this hymn appear in *Singing the Faith* 646 and a shorter version is printed here.

- 1 Come, and let us sweetly join
Christ to praise in hymns divine;
Give we all with one accord
Glory to our common Lord,
- 2 Hands and hearts and voices raise,
Sing as in the ancient days,
Antedate the joys above,
Celebrate the feast of love.
- 3 Jesu, dear expected Guest,
Thou art bidden to the feast;
For thyself our hearts prepare,
Come, and rest, and banquet there.
- 4 Sanctify us, Lord, and bless,
Breathe thy Spirit, give thy peace;
Thou thyself within us move,
Make our feast a feast of love.

7 The plate with portions of Love Feast cake is circulated. Each person receives and retains their portion as participants pass the plate to their neighbour.

8 The singing of a Love Feast grace, such as the following:

Be present at our table, Lord;
be here and everywhere adored;
thy creatures bless, and grant that we
may feast in paradise with thee.

This may be sung to any Long Metre tune, e.g. Rimington (StF328ii) or Old Hundredth (StFI)

9 The portions of Love Feast cake are eaten in silence

10 The Loving Cup is then passed in silence (or each person's glass is filled from the jug) and each person takes a sip of the water.

11 Responses to God's grace and goodness are then invited. This could include sharing reflections on the testimony offered, the scriptures read and the sermon. This could also include practical responses to the needs of the world through charitable giving or making commitments to particular social action.

12 Prayers of thanksgiving and intercession are offered in a prepared, extempore or spontaneous form.

13 A hymn such as 'Christ, from whom all blessings flow' (StF 676)

14 A Benediction or Blessing