



Background (UM Discipleship Resources)

The Love Feast is a Christian fellowship meal recalling the meals Jesus shared with disciples during his ministry and expressing the “koinonia” (community, sharing, and fellowship) enjoyed by the family of Christ. Although its origins in the early church are closely interconnected with the origins of the Lord’s Supper, the two services became quite distinct and should not be confused with each other. While the Lord’s Supper has been practically universal among Christians throughout church history, the Love Feast has appeared only at certain times and among certain denominations.

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, 10 years later.

His diary notes: “After evening prayers, we joined with the Germans in one of their love-feasts. 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 feature of the Evangelical Revival and 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. This could be used when there is no one present authorized to administer the Sacraments, or when persons of different denominations are present who do not feel free to take Holy Communion together, or when there is a desire for a service more informal and spontaneous than the communion ritual, or at a full meal or some other setting to which it would be difficult to adapt the Lord's Supper.

The Love Feast is most naturally held around a table or with persons seated in a circle; but it is possible to hold it with persons seated in rows. A church sanctuary, fellowship hall or home is an appropriate location.

One of the advantages of the Love Feast is that any Christian may conduct it. Congregational participation and leadership are an important part of the Love Feast. It should especially involve the children present.

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. Wesley counseled that all the above be done decently and in order.

Prayer and Scripture reading is vital to the Love Feast. There also may be a sermon, an exhortation, or an address, but it should be informal and consist of the leader's adding personal witness to what spontaneously comes from the congregation

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 had usually been water, but other beverages such as lemonade, juice, tea or coffee have been used. Early Methodists commonly passed a loving cup with two handles from person to person but later the drink 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, in which case persons or families may bring dishes of food for all to share. 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 LOVE FEAST SERVICE
by Dr. Ryan Nicholas Danker

“But although a difference in opinions [i.e. doctrinal matters that do not strike at the root of salvation] or modes of worship may prevent an entire external union, yet need it prevent our union in affection? Though we can’t think alike, may we not love alike? May we not be of one heart, though we are not of one opinion? Without all doubt we may. Herein all the children of God may unite, notwithstanding these smaller differences. These remaining as they are, they may forward one another in love and in good works.”

-John Wesley, “Catholic Spirit”

L: In the name of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

R: Amen

L: The Lord be with you.

R. And also with you.

Almighty Father, whose blessed Son before his passion prayed for his disciples that they might be one, as you and he are one: Grant that your Church, being bound together in love and obedience to you, may be united in one body by your one Spirit, that the world may believe in him whom you have sent, your Son Jesus Christ our Lord; who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

HYMN: “Jesus, United by Thy Grace” - *Charles Wesley* Tune: St. Agnes

**Jesus, united by thy grace
And each to each endeared,
With confidence we seek thy face
And know our prayer is heard**

**Help us to help each other, Lord,
Each other’s cross to bear;
Let all their friendly aid afford,
And feel each other’s care.**

SCRIPTURE: 1 John 4:7-21

HYMN: “Jesus, United by Thy Grace” *Charles Wesley*

**Up unto thee, our living Head,
Let us in all things grow;
Till thou hast made us free indeed
And spotless here below.**

Touched by the lodestone of thy love
Let all our hearts agree,
And ever toward each other move,
And ever move toward thee.

SCRIPTURE: Matthew 22:34-40

HYMN: "Jesus, United by Thy Grace" - *Charles Wesley*
To thee, inseparably joined,
Let all our spirits cleave;
O may we all the loving mind
That was in thee receive

This is the bond of perfectness,
Thy spotless charity;
O let us, still we pray, possess
The mind that was in thee.

THE PASSING OF THE BREAD/SWEET ROLL

L: The Lord be with you.

R: And also with you.

Prayed aloud or sung to the tune of Old 100th

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

As the bread or sweet roll is passed, each person is invited to share how he or she sees the work of God in the person who passed them the bread. The cup (water or other beverage) is passed after the bread. If dipping into the cup people need to hold their bread until the cup comes their way to be dipped.

PASSING OF THE LOVING CUP (bread or sweet roll may be dipped in the cup)

CLOSING HYMN - "Father of Earth, and Heaven" - *Charles Wesley*

Tune: Diademata

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.

DISMISSAL WITH BLESSING

Go forth into the world in peace. Be of good courage; hold fast that which is good; render to no one evil for evil; strengthen the fainthearted; support the weak; help the afflicted; honor everyone; love and serve the Lord, rejoicing in the power of the Holy Spirit; and the blessing of God Almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, be among you and remain with you always. **Amen.**