

THE AGAPE MEAL:

A liturgy for use when we are apart



The Agape Meal, also known as the Love Feast, is a meal of Christian fellowship with ancient roots. It is connected historically to the Eucharist (Holy Communion, Lord's Supper) but differs in important ways, especially in that the food and drink shared in the Agape Meal are not understood to be the body and blood of Jesus, there are no Words of Institution, and no clergy person is needed to preside.

The Agape Meal is often celebrated as part of an actual meal shared by a group of worshippers. Traditionally, it incorporates song, scripture, prayer, and an offering for those in the community who are hungry.

This version uses the structure of the Agape Meal as it is presented in the UM Book of Worship, but significant changes have been made in order to allow it to be offered via the internet or the phone. It assumes that those gathered to share the meal are alone or in small household groups.

This liturgy can be expanded with additional elements like music or a message. The texts of prayers, litanies, and songs can be added as appropriate for the format you are using, but are not necessary.

The participants should collect the following ahead of time:

- Bread or rolls, cut or torn in pieces, or crackers
- Glass(es) of water or juice of any flavor
- Bible

VERSION ONE:

For Sunday and other online worship gatherings

For the Maundy Thursday version see page 3 and for the Easter version see page 5

Words of Greeting, Introduction and Explanation

(Who you are and where you are. Notes pertaining to your congregation and the current status of your worship schedule and how to connect with pastors, staff, each other. A few words of introduction about the service itself from the above paragraphs, including whatever variations you're using – online slides, music, etc.)

Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God;

Everyone who loves is born of God and knows God.

God's love was revealed among us in this way:

God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him.

(1 John 4:7,9)

Prayers of Intercession, ending with the Lord's Prayer

Scripture

Choose one or more, depending on the day or season, context (part of a longer worship service, for example), and your congregation's worship style

- Exodus 16: 2-3, 11-18, 31-32 (Manna in the Wilderness)
- Psalm 145: 8-21 (God's Greatness and Goodness)
- Luke 9:12-17 (Feeding the Five Thousand)
- John 6:25-35 (Jesus the Bread of Life)

Passing the Food and Drink

The leader says the following, which can be repeated by the participant(s). If a household group is participating together, they may say these words to each other as they pass and eat the food and drink their water/juice.

Taste and see that God is good.

Prayer of Thanksgiving *(these or other words)*

We thank you, God, for the food that delights and nourishes us, and for Jesus who is Living Bread for us. We thank you for drink that quenches our thirst and for the Living Water with which you refresh and transform our lives. May we know the fullness of your presence at every meal and in all our sharing.

Blessing *(these or other words)*

Though apart, we are together in God's love.

Though distressed, we are calmed by Christ's peace.

Though uncertain, we are trust in the Spirit's power. Amen.

OR

May we be one in Christ, one with each other, and one in ministry to all the world, until Christ comes in final victory and we feast at his heavenly banquet. Amen.

OR

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ,

And the love of God,

And the communion of the Holy Spirit

Be with you all. Amen.

VERSION TWO:

For Maundy Thursday online worship gatherings

Besides the materials listed above, participants may need a basin of water and a towel.

Words of Greeting, Introduction and Explanation

(Who you are and where you are. Notes pertaining to your congregation and the current status of your worship schedule and how to connect with pastors, staff, each other. A few words of introduction about the service itself from the above paragraphs, including whatever variations you're using – online slides, music, etc.)

Gathered with his disciples in the Upper Room, the Lord grows troubled. Darkness grow; betrayal is at hand.

Can we watch with Him?

Can we be the friends at his table?

Can we be the companions who journey with him to the end?

Prayers of Confession

Beloved, Christ shows us his love by becoming a humble servant. Let us draw near to God and confess our sin in the truth of God's Spirit.

Most merciful God, we confess that often our spirit has not been that of Christ. Where we have failed to love one another as he loves us, where we have pledged loyalty to him with our lips and then betrayed, deserted, or denied hm, forgive us we pray.

(Time of silence or guided prayer, using the following or other words)

For the times we have failed to trust you and allowed fear to rule our hearts...

(pause)

Forgive us we pray.

For the times we have failed to offer grace or mercy to one another... *(pause)*

Forgive us we pray.

For the times we have turned away from the lives and work to which you call us...

(pause)

Forgive us we pray.

Believe the good news: In the name of Jesus Christ, we are forgiven!

Scripture

Exodus 13: 3,6-10 (Passover, the Festival of Unleavened Bread)

John 13:1-8, 12-15 (Jesus Washes the Disciples' Feet)

John 13:33-35 (The New Commandment)

Handwashing

The ritual of footwashing is traditionally part of a Maundy Thursday service. In its place, the leader may invite the watching or listening participants to join in a symbolic handwashing, using a bowl of water and towel. The following words may be offered while the hands are washed and dried.

As Jesus washed the feet of his friends, so we wash our hands, asking that the Holy Spirit may also wash our hearts, preparing us for a new life of service in Christ's name.

OR

Jesus gave us a new commandment, that we love one another just as he loves us. By this the world will know that we are his disciples.

Passing the Food and Drink

The leader says the following, which can be repeated by the participant(s). If a household group is participating together, they may say these words to each other as they pass and eat the food and drink their water/juice.

Sharing, we abide in God's love.

Prayer of Thanksgiving *(these or other words)*

We thank you, God, for even in the wilderness, you provide what we need;
even when we doubt you, you are faithful;
even when we turn away, you abide with us.
May we know the fullness of your presence at every meal and in all our sharing.

Blessing *(these or other words)*

Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you.
Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.

OR

May we be one in Christ, one with each other, and one in ministry to all the world,
until Christ comes in final victory and we feast at his heavenly banquet. Amen.

OR

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ,
And the love of God,
And the communion of the Holy Spirit
Be with you all. Amen.

VERSION THREE:

For Easter Sunday online worship gatherings

Words of Greeting, Introduction and Explanation

(Who you are and where you are. Notes pertaining to your congregation and the current status of your worship schedule and how to connect with pastors, staff, each other. A few words of introduction about the service itself from the above paragraphs, including whatever variations you're using – online slides, music, etc.)

Christ is risen! Christ is risen indeed! Alleluia!

OR

Jesus said, "I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die."

(John 11:25)

Prayers of Intercession *(with these or other words),*

In the peace of the risen Christ, let us pray to the Lord:

for the joy of his holy and life-giving resurrection... *(pause)*

for the gift of strength and healing for all who suffer and whose lives are weighed down by the viral pandemic, especial medical workers, first responders, those who must work and those who are out of work, the sick and their families, all who have lost someone they love... *(pause)*

for courage and wisdom to act for the common good, especially leaders of the nations of the world, leaders of faith communities including our own United Methodist Church, its conferences and congregations, employers and decisionmakers, parents and care-givers... *(pause)*

for the vulnerable, the isolated, and those whose voices are not heard, especially the poor, the elderly, and the very young... *(pause)*

[other intercessions may be added specific to your community]

Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful, and kindle in them the fire of your love. Send forth your Spirit and they shall be created, and you will renew the face of the earth.

The Lord's Prayer

Scripture

- Romans 6:3-11 (Dying and Rising with Christ)
- One of the Gospel resurrection lessons:
 - o Matthew 28:1-10
 - o Mark 16:1-8
 - o Luke 24:1-12

Passing the Food and Drink

The leader says the following, which can be repeated by the participant(s). If a household group is participating together, they may say these words to each other as they pass and eat the food and drink their water/juice.

Christ is risen! Alleluia!

Prayer of Thanksgiving *(these or other words)*

God of new life, with the rising of the sun you have raised Jesus Christ and delivered him and us from death's destruction. We praise you for all your gifts, and especially for the assurance of your presence at every meal and in all our sharing. Amen

Blessing *(these or other words)*

May the God of holiness and light give you a new spirit, that you may share Christ's saving grace with the whole world. Amen.

OR

May we be one in Christ, one with each other, and one in ministry to all the world, until Christ comes in final victory and we feast at his heavenly banquet. Amen.

OR

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ,
And the love of God,
And the communion of the Holy Spirit
Be with you all. Amen.

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