

easter offering 2010

COMPANIONS IN FAITH, HOPE AND LOVE



LEADER'S
NOTES

● INTRODUCTION

This service has been prepared by Pamela Turner (Connexional Women's Network President 2007/2008). The service is based on Pam's theme for her year of office – Companions in Faith.

● HYMNS

The service includes the hymns:

- For the beauty of the earth (*Hymns & Psalms* 333)
- Christ has risen while earth slumbers
- What shall our greeting be (*Hymns & Psalms* 806)
- Jesu, Jesu (*Hymns & Psalms* 145)
- Brother, sister, let me serve you

It is assumed that congregations will have access to *Hymns & Psalms*. The two hymns not in *Hymns & Psalms* are printed on a separate sheet to accompany the order of service.

The tune written for 'Christ has risen while earth slumbers' is in *Enemy of Apathy* (Wild Goose Publications, 1988). However the metre 8.7.8.7.D. lends itself to many other tunes in *Hymns & Psalms*, not least Abbots Leigh, Blaenwern and Hyfrydol.

The music for 'Brother, sister, let me serve you' can be found in many modern hymnbooks including *Rejoice and Sing* (no 74), *Songs of Fellowship* – Combined Edition (no 54) and *Common Ground* (no 16).

In addition the gathering together verse 'As we are gathered' can either be said or sung. The tune is in various hymnbooks including *Rejoice and Sing*, *Mission Praise* and *Songs of Fellowship*.

● STORIES

There are three stories included in the service:

- Companions
- Faith in Action in The Gambia
- Hope in Action in Latvia

The stories are printed in full at the end of these notes.

You may also have your own stories that you wish to include.

● PRAYERS

These are suitable for the opening prayers or at other points in the service.

● PRAYER OF ADORATION

Almighty God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, we worship you.

You are the eternal God, majestic God, creator God. You bring light out of darkness and order out of chaos.

You are a faithful God, who knows all our needs. You are a God of hope in whom we put our trust. You are a God of wisdom and justice. You are a God of love whose love reaches our innermost being.

You reveal that love through your Son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ, and the power of the Holy Spirit. We open our hearts and minds to your presence among us. Amen.

● PRAYER OF CONFESSION

Generous God, You have given us so much, yet we have so often given you so little. At times we become jealous, self-centred and lacking in zeal.

We put ourselves before others and find it hard to follow the way of Christ.

You are a loving and a forgiving God, full of compassion and ready to forgive us.

We ask you to forgive us in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

● ASSURANCE OF FORGIVENESS

There is no now condemnation for those who live in union with Christ Jesus; for the law of the Spirit of life has set us free from the law of sin and death. Amen. Thanks be to God.

● PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING

Loving God, we give you thanks for all the good and perfect gifts you give to us.

We thank you for: showing your creative power in the wonder and diversity of culture and tradition; your word which nourishes, sustains and encourages us to serve you; the faithful people who have served the World Church in sometimes very difficult circumstances; the relationships we have with our families and friends.

We thank you for Jesus your Son, our Lord and Saviour, whose earthly life and ministry touched the lives of many ordinary people and still touches our lives and the lives of others now.

We thank you that by his death and resurrection which revealed your victory over sin and death, we know that in him we have the promise of eternal life.

Father, Son and Holy Spirit, yours is a love that is steadfast and never fails. We put our confidence in you. Amen.

● THE LOVE FEAST



● BACKGROUND

The tradition of the Love Feast is derived from the practice of the earliest Christians to share a simple meal together and to follow it by a time of worship and, in particular, testimony. It should be distinguished from the Lord's Supper or Holy Communion, which centres on thanksgiving for the sacrifice of Christ on the cross. By contrast, the Love Feast or Agapé is a time of mutual encouragement of Christian love for believers.

As time went by, however, it fell into disuse, and it was only in the eighteenth century, with the Moravians, a group of Christians originating in Central Europe and Germany, that it was revived. When John Wesley encountered the Moravians at first hand he saw that the holding of Love Feasts was an excellent way of devotion for the societies in his care. From the first occasions held in London, and later further afield, the practice grew so that many Methodist chapels began to hold them on a regular basis, often quarterly. In a few places this practice still continues.

Perhaps the popularity of Love Feasts has declined as spontaneity in worship has diminished, and there is a greater unwillingness for people to speak of their religious feelings in public. Nevertheless such occasions are especially suitable for ecumenical gatherings where all can freely participate.

● ARRANGEMENTS

A suitable leader should arrange this part of the service. It requires sensitivity and careful planning, but need not be unduly long. There are two important features:

- There is a time for eating cake or biscuits, followed by a little water, or, still in traditional mode, a small quantity of tea. The food was often cake, baked to a special recipe such as the one included here. The water was often drunk with the aid of a two-handled Love Feast cup. It is probably more acceptable for us to use individual cups. It is a token meal, to be taken in a joyful but solemn mood, with a sense of reverent quietness. The clear purpose in this part of the service is for all to draw close to God and to each other.
- There is also a time of testimony. It would be appropriate for, say, two or three people to speak of some recent awareness of God, working within the believer, rather than a distant recollection. Contributions should be planned beforehand. The order should never, however, become rigidly controlled. If someone who is not planned wishes to speak, they should be encouraged to do so, but briefly. The leader should help the gathering along, to ensure that all who are present are at ease within the setting of this worship.

It may be also appropriate for more short stories from the World Church to be shared at this point, or to use the prayers of intercession. In addition you may wish to sing the Part 1 of 'Come and let us sweetly join' (*Hymns & Psalms* 756).

If your service includes the Love Feast then this explanation needs to be shared with those present:

This part of the Easter Offering Service moves into the features of a traditional Love Feast. This used to be, and in a few places still is, a feature of Methodist devotional life, and it is to be hoped that this opportunity will be valuable for our present-day

devotion too. It should be noted that a Love Feast is not to be seen in any way connected with a service of Holy Communion.

There will be, firstly, a time of eating and drinking. We shall share a little cake (made using a traditional recipe) or biscuits, and then we shall drink a little water (or fruit juice or tea). A few people have been asked to share some experience of God's love or power in their lives. If anyone else wishes to contribute to this time of testimony they will be welcome to do so. Above all it should be a time of quiet devotion, and may therefore include some spoken prayers or the words of a hymn, all of which contribute to a sense of God's presence within the worship.

● LOVE FEAST CAKE RECIPE

This recipe was adapted from the Middlesmoor Lovefeast Bread used in the Yorkshire Dales at the time of John Wesley, and is still made now.

- 1lb (400g) plain flour
 - 1oz (25g) baking powder
 - 5oz (125g) butter
 - 8oz (200g) sugar
 - 2oz (50g) mixed peel
 - 4oz (100g) sultanas
 - 2 eggs
 - About half a pint (280ml) of milk
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- Mix the flour and baking powder together, rub in the butter, then add the sugar, sultanas and peel.
 - Beat the eggs together with a little milk and add to the dry ingredients.
 - Add the rest of the milk to make a soft consistency.
 - Pour the mixture into two loaf tins or a large cake tin. Cook at 180°C (350°F) or gas mark 4 for at least 45 minutes for the loaf tins, or 1 hour for the large cake tin.

● STORIES

● COMPANIONS

As well as being a Methodist minister at Wesley's Chapel in London, the Revd Jennifer Potter recently became the 'companion' for the Methodist Church in Britain to the people of the Methodist Church in Zimbabwe.

The position of companion is a pilot project. At present there are three companions in place – Conrad Hicks, a minister in the Methodist Church in Ireland, is a companion with the Church in Guatemala and Ward Jones, chair of the Bristol District, with the Church in South Korea. It is hoped that if this initiative works well it will be rolled out to all Partner Churches which British Methodism has around the world.

Jennifer says:

"For me, being appointed companion to the Methodist Church in Zimbabwe was almost like a homecoming. I worked in Southern Africa for 25 years – first in Zambia and then in Botswana, largely as a teacher but also as a preacher. In Botswana I was very active in the ecumenical Christian Council and through that travelled the whole region. So I am not a stranger to Zimbabwe although I have never worked there.

"I was able to visit Zimbabwe in August/September 2009 though for only five days. It was just a 'taster' for me, an introduction to the work and the people of the Methodist Church. I was there for most of their annual Conference and it was a chance to hear of the struggles and challenges of the past year – the hunger in some parts of the country, the intimidation, torture and killing of people in the confrontation between the opposing political parties, and the dire economic circumstances.

"Lesser people would have succumbed under these challenges but the people of Zimbabwe remain dignified, resilient and full of faith. Their faithfulness to the gospel and to each other is truly a witness to us.

"I hope in the coming years that I shall be able to travel to different parts of the country to see the work of the Church – not only on behalf of its own members but on behalf of the most needy communities around the country. To be a companion on the way with them is a great privilege."

● FAITH IN ACTION IN THE GAMBIA

The Revd David Gamble visited The Gambia in May 2009. He writes about one of the Methodist projects he visited whilst there:

The Methodist Church in The Gambia is a tiny Church in terms of its membership – about 1,200 people – in a country of 1,500,000 which is 96% Muslim. The Methodist Church has been active in The Gambia for 188 years. And over that time, they have had to work out what their role is. They've now got what I think would be described a 'theology of presence' – being the Body of Christ in that place.

The Church has a number of different projects which have a significant effect in the life of the country. These tend to be educational, medical or agricultural, and often take place on the same site.

In Brikama, next to the Methodist church there is Longman's Memorial School. And on the same site there is also a dental clinic and a jam factory. In fact, it is the first ever Methodist jam factory that I have ever come across.

In The Gambia they have wonderful fruit crops like mangoes which, once the season comes, people take off the trees and eat. Otherwise the fruit just drops and rots.

But a few years ago someone thought it would be a good idea to show local people how you can preserve fruit. So they set up a jam factory. It is just a small building with a couple of ovens in. And people bring their old jam pots there. The jars are washed carefully and filled with the most wonderful jam, made mainly out of mango. In addition they also make pickles and chutneys and other sorts of things.

You will find the jam used in schools and hospitals all over The Gambia. And they are not restricted to Methodist consumption either!

The project gives work for some women in the local community, but it also says, "Ok, you've got resources here that are going to waste and actually you can use them."

The idea is really so simple because anyone can do it with very minimal equipment. And yet it makes a huge difference both in terms of useful jobs for people, and good food. So brilliant! (And spectacularly good jam!)

● HOPE IN ACTION IN LATVIA

The Revd Gita Mednis is the superintendent of the Methodist Church in Latvia. She lives and works in its capital Riga.

Gita writes:

The Methodist Church in Great Britain together with the United Methodist Church of Latvia have been sheltering, feeding, clothing and giving hope, through the love of Christ, to young single mothers from dysfunctional families. These young women and their babies have no loving family to surround, teach, or love them. At the Hope Center we, as staff and friends, are their mothers and families.

Together, we offer hope for a brighter future and teach them about the unconditional love of God. All the young women who come into our care have been physically and mentally abused. The Hope Center gives them a chance to experience caring love and friendship.

A highlight of this ministry is to see trust beginning to build when the young women realise that we want nothing from them. Instead, we just want to give them an opportunity for a different kind of life. We teach them life skills and how to care for their babies. We want to ensure that the first year of their life will be lived in a safe and loving environment.

Last winter a young mother with her two-week-old baby arrived at the Center. The father of her child was sending her out into the street to earn money. She desperately wanted to keep her baby and was willing to fight for the opportunity.

She arrived on Friday and on Sunday night her baby died. The mother was, of course, inconsolable. She said her last words to the baby had been "Jesus and Mommy are watching over you. I love you." She had put a cross above her bed the night before.

No family. A stranger to us. No-one to turn to except the father, who was of no help. The police arrived and because of the mother's past, put her under house arrest until the result of the autopsy was received. But the local hospital would not transport the baby to the main Riga hospital until the following week. The mother was hysterical, so we grouped around her and urged to have the autopsy performed as soon as possible. We arranged for a doctor to accompany our director to take the little body to the mortuary in Riga.

We made arrangements to buy flowers, a casket and a cemetery plot. The friends from the Hope Center attended the funeral, and we grieved with this new mother. The child had died of sudden death syndrome. The arrangements were incredibly difficult and filled with many obstacles. It is hard to imagine how this heartbroken young mother could have done all of this by herself. How does one go about having a funeral with no money? With no contacts?

During this very difficult time we truly were companions in faith, hope and love.

Your financial help and prayers helped us hold this young mother in our arms and be her family. We are able to minister to the bewildered young mothers at the Hope Center. We are able to offer them, as "companions in faith", hope, God's love, our love and, through it all, the faith that upholds each of us.



The Methodist Church 

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Design and production: Methodist Publishing
The Methodist Church Registered Charity No 1132208.