

# The Agape Meal (Love Feast)

*(Agape meals do not require an approved/licensed officiant; Communion services do)*

## Order of Service

### Lighting the Christ Candle (responsive)

**One:** Jesus said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life." (John 8:12, NIV)

**All:** **Jesus said, "You are the light of the world...let your lights shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify God in Heaven." (Matthew 5:14, 16, NIV)**

**One:** We light the Christ candle to celebrate the light of Christ that penetrates and removes our darkness.

**All: We light the Christ candle to remind ourselves that Jesus has called us to reflect his light in God's world.**

### Introduction to the Agape Meal

**One:** An agape meal, or Love Feast, is a Christian fellowship meal that recalls the meals shared with disciples during his ministry, and expresses the community, sharing and fellowship enjoyed by the family of Christ. Its origins in the early church are closely interconnected with the origins of the Lord's Supper but the two became quite distinct and should not be confused with each other.

### Hymn

VU 467      One Bread, One Body

### Gathering Words (responsive)

**One:** 'They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.' (Acts 2:42)

**All:** **'They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favour of all the people.'** (Act 2 46b-47a, NIV)

**One:** We gather now to break bread with each other, celebrating the fellowship into which we have all been called and the love of God that binds us together.

**All: Praise be to God!**

### First Scripture Reading

#### **Luke 14:16-2**

*Jesus replied: "A certain man was preparing a great banquet and invited many guests. At the time of the banquet he sent his servant to tell those who had been invited, 'Come, for everything is now ready.'*

*"But they all alike began to make excuses. The first said, 'I have just bought a field, and I must go and see it. Please excuse me.'*

*“Another said, ‘I have just bought five yoke of oxen, and I’m on my way to try them out. Please excuse me.’*

*“Still another said, ‘I just got married, so I can’t come.’*

*“The servant came back and reported this to his master. Then the owner of the house became angry and ordered his servant, ‘Go out quickly into the streets and alleys of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame.’*

*“‘Sir,’ the servant said, ‘what you ordered has been done, but there is still room.’*

*“Then the master told his servant, ‘Go out to the roads and country lanes and compel them to come in, so that my house will be full.’”*

### **Grace** (sung)

Words: Charles Wesley Tune: *This Is God’s Wondrous World*

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 the love.

### **Passing the Bread** (responsive)

One: The Israelites said to them, “If only we had died by the Lord’s hand in Egypt. There we sat around pots of meat and ate all the food we wanted, but you have brought us out into the desert to starve this entire assembly to death.” Then the Lord said to Moses, “I will rain down bread from heaven for you.” (Exodus 16:3–4, NIV)

**All: Jesus said, “Very truly I tell you, it is not Moses who has given you bread from heaven but it is my Father who gives the true bread from heaven...” Then Jesus declared, “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry.” (John 6:32, 35, NIV)**

One: We remember the one who is the Bread of Life.

*The bread is shared*

### **Passing the Cup**

One: But the people were thirsty for water there, and they grumbled against Moses. They said, “Why did you bring us up out of Egypt to make us and our children and our livestock die of thirst?” The Lord answered Moses, “...I will stand before you by the rock of Horeb. Strike the rock and water will come out of it for the people to drink.” (Exodus 17:3, 5a, 6a, NIV)

**All: Jesus said, “Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life.” (John 4:13–14, NIV)**

One: We remember the One who is the Water of Life.

*The cup of water is shared*Grace Before the Meal (sung)

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 MealSecond Scripture Reading**Luke 10:38–42**

*As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said. But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!"*

*"Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "you are worried and upset about many things, but few things are needed—or indeed only one. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her."*

Reflection (on last page)Closing Prayer (in unison)

We give you thanks, O God, for the fellowship that we have shared today and for the fellowship we are invited to share wherever we are and with whomever we meet. May this feast of love ever remind us that all are welcomed in your presence and that each is offered your love and grace. As we have shared freely here at this table, may we be mindful of the needs of your people wherever they are and, by your Spirit, may we be guided to share your love in real and tangible ways each and every day. We pray in the name of the One who came that his joy may be in us and that our joy may be full; even Jesus Christ our Lord. And we pray new the words he taught all his disciples to pray:

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. And deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory for ever and ever. Amen.

Hymn

VU 481 Sent Forth by God's Blessing

Benediction (responsive)

One: It is the love of Christ that has brought us together in fellowship today.

**All: It is the love of Christ that brings us into fellowship with all God's children.**

One: Let us take the blessings that have been ours today and bring them into God's world and into the lives of God's people.

**All: May we let our lights shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify God in heaven.**

## Reflection on Luke 10:38–42

The events in this reading took place in a society with set rules and roles for the various citizens. In a predominantly patriarchal society, the role of women was limited and rather explicit. For the most part, they were considered subservient to men and were responsible for the care of the household and the family. In this particular instance, when Jesus and his disciples were visiting with Martha, Mary and Lazarus there would be certain expectations. It was common practice to greet visitors with a foot washing to give comfort to tired and dirty feet that had traveled the hot, dusty roads; it was also common practice to prepare a meal for the visitors or, at the very least, to invite them to share in whatever had already been prepared. These tasks would fall to the woman of the house and, it is with this in mind, that we look at this particular story.

When Jesus came to visit, we are told that Mary took a place, with the men, at Jesus' feet. Martha, on the other hand, was busy with preparing a meal for them. She took offence at Mary for not helping with the preparations, as was expected, and she asked Jesus to instruct Mary to help. Jesus, however, saw things in a different way, as he so often did. Instead of chiding Mary for shirking her responsibilities, he accepted her desire to spend time with him and to listen to what he had to say. Mary wanted to be present with and learn from her Lord and Jesus saw this as the better choice. He was not denigrating Martha's attention to her perceived role but, at the same time, he was praising Mary for her desire to share and grow in the fellowship Jesus offered. The fellowship and hospitality that was offered, in this particular instance, was two-fold: Martha representing societal expectations and Mary representing the more spiritual side. Both had their place but, in Jesus' mind and heart, the spiritual was of greater value.

As United Church Women, we, too, have also been met with certain expectations, be they right or wrong, from the churches in which we fellowship and serve. Throughout our history, we have often been viewed as the ones a church would turn to for refreshment; need a lunch after church—call the UCW; need a fundraising dinner—call the UCW. Overall, we have been seen, and treated, as the Martha's of the church. However, we know differently. The United Church Women have always been, first and foremost, the Mary's of the church; seeking spiritual growth and nurture, sharing God's love within our communities of faith and around the world. We have, and continue to be, women who strive to learn from Jesus and to share the gospel message with the world through our words, our actions and our witness. We fill those dual roles that Jesus acknowledged in this story; we are workers, like Martha and we are devoted learners like Mary.

In our agape meal, and in all agape meals, we are witness to the importance of action and spirituality. The agape meal was, and is, intended for all people regardless of their status or means; the rich, the poor; the friend, the stranger; the sinner, the saint. All come together to feed

each other; all work together to prepare the setting and the meal; all come together to share in the fellowship and love of God and the Christian community. But, above all else, all come to be fed spiritually—to share in the Bread of Life and to drink from the well of Living Water. We diligently carry out our work as Martha did but each of us is offered that place at Jesus’ feet; that place that Jesus said is ‘better’ and it will never be taken from us.