

Holding a love feast online

The Faith and Order Committee has recently completed a resource for the celebration of Love Feasts. In the current circumstances, when many are looking for resources for online worship, we felt it might be helpful to offer some guidance as to how this resource could be used in electronic contexts.

The key features of a Love Feast as stated in the opening notes are "sharing, belonging and fellowship." This is as possible when participants are connected via various electronic means as when they are physically in the same place. Unlike Holy Communion, there is no question of action towards the food/drink that is shared other than being thankful for it and consuming it and a Love Feast is not a sacrament. Because of that, different considerations apply here to those that led to the Conference's judgment on 'online communion'.

If you are considering holding an online love feast, we hope this guidance will be helpful. There are many platforms that could be used and you will need to consider which might best meet your needs and the needs of your potential participants. Some will be more complicated and need more technical know-how; others are more simple. The examples here are deliberately at the simpler end.

We offer below some examples of how the broad shape of the resources might be brought to life in different electronic contexts. They are by way of example and are not prescriptive – you might need or want to adapt them; you might have better ideas! This guidance has been produced relatively quickly and will benefit from being revised in the light of experience. If you try an online love feast (using this or other resources), the Convenor of the Worship and Liturgy Subcommittee¹ would be interested to hear about your experience and reflections.

Facebook post

This is probably one of the simplest ways of celebrating a love feast online. Participants simply need an account on Facebook and only need to be able to comment to join in. It could probably take place over an extended time with participants taking part when they are able. This might be best hosted on a church or circuit's Facebook group or page.

The leader would open the love feast with an opening post. People can participate by engaging with the songs and scripture and by posting their own testimony. You should make sure people are aware of the privacy settings of the post and who can see what they will share. Here is an example – you can tailor it to your own needs including choosing readings and songs.

Welcome to our online love feast, which is a way of expressing the sharing, belonging and fellowship we have together as followers of Jesus. A key part of it is to share testimony - how your story is part of God's story. 'My life is different because I believe God has changed my . . . challenged my . . . loved me . . .' It is where you are. It is who you are. No need to pretend. It is your testimony.

A second key part is to share food and drink – often cake or bread and tea or water. You will need to get your own! It's helpful to get them ready before you start.

To begin listen to this worship song <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3een0s6jrdY>.

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Say this prayer: Holy God, we thank you that wherever we are you are with us. We praise you that in Christ we have new life. Unite us in this worship by your Holy Spirit that we may each know your blessing. Amen.

Then read Matthew 22:34-40 <http://bible.oremus.org/?q=451548094>

Read through any testimonies that have already been posted as comments below, and then post your own.

Eat your food and drink your drink.

Pray for the needs of people who are on your mind and heart. Thank God for being with everyone who shares in this love feast. Consider making a practical response to God's love for example by donating to a charity like All We Can (<https://www.allwecan.org.uk/give/make-a-donation/>)

Finish by listening to this worship song <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YXRD7rPNvOM>

Twitter hashtag

Twitter is faster moving than Facebook so it would probably be best to hold this at a specified time so you'd need to advertise it beforehand. Twitter is a public medium so people should be aware that anything they share can be seen by others. Choose a suitable hashtag for your service – this example uses #lovefeast but you'd need something distinctive to your church, circuit or group. You should tell people what the hashtag is when you advertise the online love feast.

The leader begins by posting three tweets to the hashtag:

Welcome to our online love feast, which is a way of expressing the sharing, belonging and fellowship we have together as followers of Jesus. A key part of it is to share testimony - how your story is part of God's story. #lovefeast

A second key part is to share food and drink – often cake or bread and tea or water. You will need to get your own! It's helpful to get them ready before you start. #lovefeast

Let's listen to this worship song <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3een0s6jrdY>. #lovefeast

After enough time has passed for the song, the leader tweets this prayer or a similar one:

Holy God, we thank you that wherever we are you are with us. We praise you that in Christ we have new life. Unite us in this worship by your Holy Spirit that we may each know your blessing. Amen. #lovefeast

And then:

Let's read Matthew 22:34-40 <http://bible.oremus.org/?q=451548094> #lovefeast

After enough time for people to read the text:

What do you think God is saying to us through that reading? #lovefeast

Participants can then share their thoughts, also using the hashtag.

The leader might like to sum up the reading, before inviting people to share testimony:

Please share something of how your life is different because you believe God has changed you . . . challenged you . . . loved you . . .' It is where you are. It is who you are. No need to pretend. It is your testimony. #lovefeast

After the testimonies are finished, the leader invites people to consume their food and drink:

Let's eat and drink together, in thankfulness to God. #lovefeast

Then the leader can invite prayers for others and prayers of thanks:

Let's pray for others and let's thank God for the blessings we know. Please share your prayers. #lovefeast

You might like to make a practical response by donating to All We Can
<https://www.allwecan.org.uk/give/make-a-donation/> #lovefeast

Finish by listening to a song:

We finish by listening to this song: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YXR7rPNvOM>
#lovefeast

Video-conference:

Using a platform such as Zoom or Skype, many people can join a video-call together. You would need to advertise a day and time beforehand and ensure people knew how to join the call.

In this situation, you could use the suggested resource fairly well as it stands with the leader taking the parts they would take in a physical service and those joined to the conversation being able to hear and respond. As before participants would need to have their own food and drink ready before the love feast started. In this situation, using the approach of prepared testimony may work best. Depending on the video-conference platform you use it may be more or less easy to play music in the call, but the songs are not essential.

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