

## A MORAVIAN LOVEFEAST

The **Moravian Church**, also called the *Unitas Fratrum* (Latin for the "Unity of the Brethren"), is one of the oldest Protestant denominations in the world. The name comes from the original exiles who fled to Saxony in 1722 from Moravia to escape religious persecution, but its heritage began in 1457 in Bohemia, today part of the Czech Republic. The modern church numbers about a million members, of which many are in the US, typically in the areas of Lititz, Pennsylvania and Winston-Salem, North Carolina. The Church places a high value on ecumenism, personal piety, missions, and music.



The **Moravian lovefeast** is a service of song at which a simple meal is served to the congregation. This meal, usually a bun and coffee, is an act of fellowship. It is not a sacrament, or a substitute for Communion.

The Lovefeast, begun by the Moravians in 1727, is a revival of the Agape Meal of the early Christian church. Almost any special occasion is appropriate for a lovefeast. They are held to celebrate important festival days, to honor guests, to recognize a congregation's milestones, to bid a farewell to neighbors moving away, or to bind the church community into a spiritual unity when this need was felt.

There is usually singing during a lovefeast, either an extended anthem by the choir, a series of hymns sung by the congregation, or the verses of a single hymn separated by readings carrying forward a particular theme.

Lovefeasts in Moravian churches are usually held in the sanctuaries, with *dieners* (servers) bringing in huge trays of mugs and baskets of buns. All of the serving takes place while the hymns are being sung. The spirit of the service is one of devotion and dignity. When the whole congregation has been served, a grace is prayed in unison. Then, while the choir sings, the congregation participates in spiritual conversation and fellowship--the lovefeast. At Christmastime lovefeasts, lighted beeswax candles are passed to each person. These have red crepe ruffs shielding the hand from melting wax.

Today, churches of many denominations have adapted the Moravian lovefeast to their own use to address similar communal, spiritual needs.

*In essentials, unity; in non-essentials, liberty;  
and in all things, love.*

Moravian Bishop John Comenius, 17<sup>th</sup> Century