

FEETWASHING

We believe in the ordinance of footwashing as a celebration of the incarnation.

We remember in this ordinance that Jesus Christ was the Word become flesh to dwell among us (John 1:14). In the words of Philippians 2:7-8, Jesus "emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross" (RSV). In describing what happened in the upper room, John affirmed the incarnation with the words, "Jesus, knowing that the father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God, rose from supper" (John 13:3-4 RSV).

We understand this ordinance to represent his giving up of his heavenly glory to become human being, and his willingness to take the form of a servant.

We believe the service of footwashing reminds us of our calling to be servants.

As Christians, we are called to be servants with our Servant Lord. In this ordinance we commemorate the meaning of Christian life as a life of service. Jesus made this clear in the upper room when he washed his disciples' feet. "When he had washed their feet, and taken his garments, and resumed his place, he said to them, 'Do you know what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord; and you are right, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you.' Truly, truly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master" (John 13:12 -16 RSV).

Speaking to disciples anxious for position and power who equated greatness with rank and authority, Jesus said, "Whoever would be first among you must also be slave of all. For the Son of man also came not to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:43 -45 RSV).

In the Church of God at Philippi, Euodia and Syntyche may have been caught up in the same self-centeredness as the disciples (Philippians 4:2). Paul counseled the Church, "Do nothing from selfishness or conceit, but in humility count others better than yourselves. ... Have this mind among yourselves which you have in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 2:3, 5 RSV). Having the mind of Christ Jesus is being like our Savior "who emptied himself, taking the form of a servant" (Philippians 2:7 RSV).

Whatever our position in society, washing one another's feet reminds Christians of their calling to serve one another as brothers and sisters equal in Christ.

We believe this ordinance is an expression of our love for one another.

John said of Jesus in the upper room, as he was about to wash his disciples' feet, "Having loved his own, who were in the world, he loved them to the end" (John 13:1 RSV). "His own" whom he loved "to the end" included Judas, deceiver and betrayer.

After Jesus washed the disciples' feet, he gave them the new commandment to "love one another, even as I loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:34 -35 RSV). What is more essential to the life and well-being of the Church than that Christians truly love one another?

We believe this ordinance reminds us of our need to minister and to be ministered to.

The Christian life is a pilgrimage. "For here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city which is to come" (Hebrews 13:14 RSV). As we move toward the heavenly city, we need each other and have the privilege and responsibility to serve one another. "Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ" (Galatians 6:2 NIV). It should be noted, however, that we need to allow others to "bear our burdens." It is sometimes more difficult in the Church to allow ourselves to be ministered to than to minister.

In life we hurt and get hurt. Sometimes we fail, and other times we are victims of others' wrongdoing. We need to be forgiven and we need to forgive, to minister and be ministered to. We are called to be like Christ to each other. This ordinance reminds us of our continuing ministry as Christians, a ministry both given and received. This ordinance is a beautiful symbol of our care for one another.

We believe this ordinance helps us prepare for the Lord's Supper.

The ordinance of feetwashing is generally observed in conjunction with the ordinance of the Lord's Supper. It can help us to come to the Lord's table properly prepared, in right relationship with God and our brothers and sisters in Christ. Jesus tells us, "If you are offering your gift at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and

go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift" (Matthew 5:23-24 RSV).

Since time is not an essential element in observing the Lord's Supper, the ordinance of footwashing is effective whether or not in company with the Lord's Supper. The celebration of the incarnation, the reminder that the Christian is called to be a servant, the need to express our Christian love and affection, and to minister and be ministered to—all are present whenever we observe this ordinance.