

online edition

Union in Communion



*How one special, family-type service changed
my opinion of Communion*

I

BY ELLSWORTH WELLMAN

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didn't use to like Communion services. You might be surprised, because I have been a lifelong member of the Adventist Church and pastored for more than 40 years. I have held Communion services every quarter. After I retired I sat on the board of my local church and counseled that we didn't need to have Communion every three months. This was readily accepted. The text says, "Whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes" (1 Cor. 11:26, NIV).

After retiring, I have tried very hard to make Communion a personal spiritual venture, but it hasn't worked very well. Christ shedding His blood for me and taking what I deserve so He can give me eternal life, which He deserved, means a lot to me. I accept the spilled blood and the broken body as a sacrifice so I can have the gift of eternal life. I am grateful for this every hour of every day. But ritual hasn't done much for me.

I have been to agape feasts of all kinds (even though I don't necessarily enjoy them, I still go).

I moved recently and joined a new congregation of about 100 people who sing a lot and do church in a different way. I am on their board, and when Communion came up I voiced my thoughts. Several others thought the same way. The young pastor (just out of college) wanted to

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try his kind of "agape feast." So it was planned.

Lentil soup, fruit, and breads were brought. This was set up on a couple tables. We sat in chairs in a semicircle and ate. Soon our well-trained musical group-with two guitars, a flute, a keyboard, and five singers-led out in the praise music. This was a very spiritual beginning to a great Communion evening. The man who read the scripture had never done this service before. He had been coming to church only a couple months. He has been clean from his alcoholism for three years. (His son is a recovering alcoholic at 15 years of age, and his ex-wife is still an alcoholic.)

Communion and Community

The Significance of the Foot-washing Service

After a short talk by our young pastor, junior-aged children handed us basins. My wife and I served each other. When I went to refill my basin, a young junior poured the water. Around the room families were taking part in the service. Next to me a husband and wife and young boy were serving one another. When we were through I kissed my wife and wished for us many more years of happiness. I noticed other couples with their children hugging and kissing. I saw one man walk by in his stocking feet carrying his big boots. I thought to myself, *This sure isn't the picture of Communion in the upper room that I have.* There were children everywhere-under the table, sitting with their parents on the floor, and in chairs.

We sang some more. Then the pastor came by with a bread tray, and we tore off a piece. Following him were some young children handing out cups, and another child pouring grape juice. The music leader read from the Bible, and we ate the bread and drank the wine. All of this with soft, spiritual, contemplative praise songs.

I watched the families. One father was sitting on the floor with a group of young children around him. He saw to it that each child had bread and a cup of juice. In this service there were no exclusions. Some children might not know the full meaning of what was taking place, but they knew they were included and were a part of this Communion and of this church. It thrilled my heart to see all this and be a part of it. It was as if all those children were part of my family, and their parents, whom I love, were gently caring for them. The great spiritual music, the family togetherness, and the intimacy made this the best Communion I could ever ask for.

Ellsworth Wellman writes from Yakima, Washington.

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