

## Maundy Thursday Possibilities for the Church

Maundy Thursday is the day before Good Friday. Because it falls in Holy Week, it is sometimes referred to as Holy Thursday. The word 'Maundy' derives from the Latin word 'mandatum', which refers to a commandment. In Christian tradition, it is rooted in the words of Jesus, in the Upper Room, when during the Last Super he said to his disciples: 'A new command I give you: Love one another' (John 13:34).



**a)** Because the commandment was given in the context of the Last Super, an ancient practice in the churches was to celebrate communion on that evening.

If your church does not already do this, could you hold a Maundy Thursday evening communion service? Perhaps focusing on Jesus' new command and its implications for us and our mission?



**b)** Some churches make this a special celebration of communion by featuring it within an actual meal together, rather than as part of a service in church, remembering that Jesus' institution of communion was within a Passover meal.

Could this be a helpful way of celebrating it in your church? It could be a church supper, with people bringing to share, and culminating in communion; it could be a number of suppers in people's homes, with people inviting others to join them, and with communion being led by members of the church.



**c)** In John 13:1-17 we read that before the eating of the Last Supper, and therefore before the institution of communion, Jesus took everyone's breath away by washing their feet. Their feet would already have been washed by servants as they entered the house, and so this

was not about physical cleanliness or comfort. Washing someone's feet was a highly important symbolic act, expressing hospitality, respect and humble service.

We see several examples in the Bible of this practice of washing people's feet, or at least providing the water for their feet to be washed. For example, this is Abraham's instinct when the three visitors come to his tent (Genesis 18: 4); it is Lot's instinct when two angels arrived (Genesis 19:1-2); it is Abigail's instinct when David's servants come to her home (1 Samuel 25:40-41). Not to offer this service was considered a shameful act, as we see from Jesus' words in Luke 7:44. In 1 Timothy 5:9-10, we see the high regard in which this practice was held by Paul.

Jesus said that his disciples should imitate his example. This is associated by many churches with the new command which Jesus gives later at the same evening meal (John 13:34). It is therefore seen by many as part of his command to us – part of Maundy Thursday.

This ceremony then normally leads to a celebration of communion together.

If your church does not already do this, could you include a foot washing ceremony in a Maundy Thursday evening communion service?



**d)** Based on Jesus' heart-breaking words in Matthew 26:40, there is an old tradition of keeping watch, in silent meditation, or in shared, spoken prayer, and with reflection on biblical passages, between the close of the Maundy Thursday service and the dawn of Good Friday.

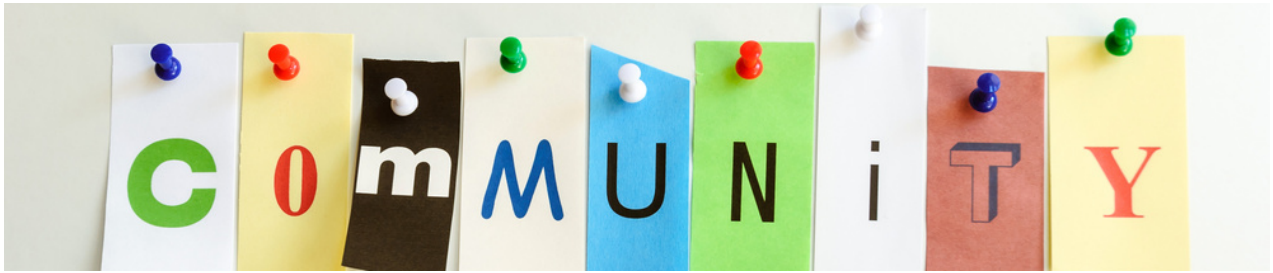
This can either be a watch through the whole night, or for an hour, as Jesus mentioned. In the former case, people may be expected to stay for the whole night, or they may be free to come and go at any points during the watch.

Could this kind of prayer vigil be helpful in your church?



**f)** Some of the churches which keep the Tenebrae service (see separate resources) add that service to the end of the Maundy Thursday evening service.

## Maundy Thursday Possibilities for Community Outreach



Some churches have decided not to copy Jesus' actual act of humility and service by washing each other's feet. However, they seek to keep the *principle* of the foot washing, but they look to show it in other ways, ways which they consider more in keeping with our lives today. This is a kind of symbolic foot washing.

Examples include:

- Washing someone's car
- Mowing someone's lawn
- Weeding someone's garden
- Giving someone flowers
- Making someone a meal
- Helping someone with a job application

Could this become a Maundy Thursday tradition in your church – proactively doing some specific act of service for people in the community?