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Summer Special!

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PREPARATION FOR GROUP LEADERS

Over the summer months, you may decide that your group won't be meeting regularly, as attendance might be lower because of holidays, but it would still be good to keep in touch and do some things together. So, in this issue, we'll be leaving behind the usual pattern, and concentrating on opportunities and ideas for fellowship and fun. As you make arrangements, just make sure everyone in your group knows when and where any events or meetings are taking place. Most of all, have fun!

PREPARATION FOR ALL PARTICIPANTS

Please check with your group leader whether you are meeting over the summer, and put the dates in your diary. For regular devotions and reflection at home, you can access the Methodist Church's daily Bible studies, 'A Word in Time': <https://www.methodist.org.uk/for-churches/resources/bible-studies/>

A PRAYER

God of life and light,
in the warmth and sunlight of the summer,
we thank you for the beauty of your creation, in all its wonderful colours and design,
for the fellowship and friendship that we find in this group,
and for the hope and purpose you give us through Jesus.
May your Spirit be known among us this day, and your name be glorified in all we do. Amen.

SOME IDEAS FOR MEETINGS OR ACTIVITIES

You don't have to do all of these(!), but here are a few ideas for summer group activities with a difference:

1. *Plan a movie night (either staying in or going to the cinema!).*
2. *Host a summer book club (choose a book to read over the summer, then meet to talk about it).*
3. *Go for a walk and pick wild flowers.*
4. *Find someone with an ice-cream maker and have an ice-cream party (with many different flavours!).*
5. *Get together to help someone with a home project – e.g. painting a room or revamping the garden.*
6. *Host an elegant party (and all get dressed up, like you're going to Ascot!).*
7. *Look out for local concerts or events and arrange to meet up.*
8. *Meet up and go star-gazing on a clear summer's night!*
9. *Go strawberry picking together (yum yum!).*
10. *Arrange to meet up for an early morning stroll.*
11. *Plan a picnic together.*
12. *Check out local food markets together, or even go to a festival.*
13. *Get out the sprinkler and run through it on a hot day!*
14. *Hold a LOVE FEAST (see over page).*
15. *Try out our Good Soil QUIZ (see over page).*

Whatever you decide to do as a group, it doesn't need to be your usual venue or time, and you might like to try joining together with other groups for extra fun.

HOLD A LOVE FEAST!

A 'Love Feast' or 'Agape' meal, is a tradition going back to the Moravian Christians in the 18th century, and probably well before that. It was picked up by John Wesley and became a favourite of the early Methodists. It is a special time of Christian fellowship, with food, prayers, hymns, and testimony. It is ideal for expressing communion with one another in God's presence, without the formalities or sacramental meaning of Holy Communion, and not needing an authorised person or minister to preside.

The Love Feast (or 'Agape' meal; *agape* is the Greek word for Christian love) is most naturally held around a table, or with persons seated in a circle. It does not need a specially authorised leader, and involves participation from all who are present, including any children. Sharing testimony and a time of praise or thanksgiving are the focal points. **Testimonies** can be a simple telling of something God has done in a person's life recently, or a story of how the person came to faith. They don't need to be long, or dramatic, but just bear witness to God's love, provision, calling, or care. **Praise** can take the form of hymns, choruses or spoken prayers. Scripture **readings** and a time of **prayer** are important too. John Wesley advised that everything should be done 'decently and in good order'. A structure or running order would certainly be useful, but it may be appropriate to have a less formal feel for the occasion.

Essential to the Love Feast is the sharing of **food and drink**. It is advisable not to use communion bread and wine, so as not to confuse it with the Lord's Supper. But the food element should be simple, not too luxurious, with the emphasis on the fellowship of sharing; for example, a sweet bread or cake, perhaps specially-baked, cut and then passed around. The beverage would usually be something simple (and non-alcoholic) such as water, lemonade, tea or coffee. This simple food and drink should be shared during the Love Feast service, but it might also be followed by a full meal together, more informally, when the service is over. Think about what would be appropriate and practical for your group. It might be especially nice to join two or more groups together to share the fellowship even wider.

GOOD SOIL QUIZ

This quiz can be used as a bit of fun, or a useful way of recapping some of the Bible passages we have looked at this year. You can do it in teams, or as individuals. Group leaders may decide to award prizes!

Answers can be found in previous issues of *Good Soil*, since September 2023 (or usually in the Bible!).

1. How many bridesmaids (or virgins) were there in Jesus' parable in Matthew 25?
2. What does the Sunday before Advent celebrate? It is often known as 'the Feast of'
3. What does John the Baptist claim he is not even worthy to do? (Mark chapter 1)
4. In Mark's Gospel, what is the author's favourite phrase, used again and again?
5. Place these in the order they occurred: *Jesus' temptations. The start of his ministry. His baptism.*
6. How many books make up the 'books of Moses'?
7. In which two places in the Old Testament will you find the Ten Commandments? (book and chapter).
8. When Paul was in Philippi, who was his first convert to Christianity? (Acts 16).
9. If Jesus is the True Vine, what are we? And what is God the Father? (John 15).
10. How many psalms are there in the Bible?
11. What controversial thing were Jesus' disciples doing on the Sabbath as they walked? (Mark 2).
12. Complete the first line of this hymn: "*Have faith in God,*"

PRAYING TOGETHER

In a time of quiet, out loud or in the silence, bring to God your prayers for the world and the church:

- Pray for those who are not able to be present with you;
- Pray the relief of poverty for children and parents in need during the school holidays;
- Pray for those who will find the warm weather difficult, and those who are lonely or housebound;
- Pray for the earth, the environment, and the global effort to reduce climate change;
- Pray for healing for those undergoing treatment, or living with long-term illness;
- Bring whatever prayers are on your hearts and minds, and share **the Lord's Prayer** together.