

PRACTICES WE EMBRACE

Middle Creek Church

A Bit of Background

The Middle Creek Church has its roots in the post-Reformation era of early *Anabaptism* and *Pietism*. While many in those days appreciated the work of the Reformers (Martin Luther, John Calvin, John Knox and others), the *Anabaptists* felt they (the Reformers) didn't go far enough in their break from the traditions of the Catholic Church. As a result, during the 1500s and 1600s, small bands of Christians sprang up in various parts of Europe. One of those groups came to be known as the *Anabaptists* (or the *Re-baptizers*) because they rejected infant baptism, and only baptized penitent believers who were old enough to believe on their own accord.

Later, another group came to be identified as the "*Pietists*." Because they placed special emphasis on holy living, they were nicknamed "*the pious ones*" (Pietists). The Pietists stressed correctness of doctrine, the necessity of complete repentance, and a striving to follow carefully the teachings of Jesus, especially His Sermon on the Mount.

After diligent and intensive Bible Study, Alexander Mack (founder of the *Brethren* movement), along with seven other believers, in the summer of 1708 decided to receive adult baptism by trine immersion in the Eder River that flowed through Schwarzenau, Germany. One of the eight (chosen by lot) baptized Mack, and he in turn baptized the other seven. They were known as the *German Baptist Brethren* (later called the *Church of the Brethren*). After intense persecution, the *Brethren* began migrating to America beginning in 1719.

With that as a bit of background, what follows are practices that we as a congregation embrace – practices based on our understanding of scripture.

Trine Immersion Baptism

In the Bible, baptism is linked with two concepts – *Faith* (Mk. 16:16) and *Repentance* (Acts 2:38). We believe that the mode of baptism that most nearly fits the pattern described in the New Testament is a threefold forward immersion in water. We baptize with a *forward* motion because Rom. 6:5 says we are planted (in baptism) in the likeness of Christ's *death*, not in the likeness of his *burial*. And because the Greek word "*baptize*" means to immerse, we follow the clear baptismal formula which says it is to be done in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit (Mat. 28:19-20).

Feet Washing

In our congregation's history, the Love Feast has been regarded as a service consisting of three parts – the preparatory ordinance of *Feet Washing*, the central ordinance of the *Fellowship Meal*, and the climaxing ordinance of the *Communion* consisting of the Bread and Cup. Scripture is clear in that Jesus washed the feet of His disciples (Jn. 13:1-12), and that He gave them (and us!) an example to follow (Jn. 13:13-17). Washing one another's feet has a threefold significance – it speaks of *humility* – it speaks of *cleansing* – and it speaks of *service*. Jesus set the example of feet washing, and tells us to do likewise.

The Fellowship (or Agape) Meal

In our understanding of scripture, the bread and cup aren't the *Lord's Supper*. The word "*supper*" is translated from the Greek word "*deipnon*" which means "*a simple evening meal*." Nor is the *Fellowship (or Agape) Meal* the *Jewish Passover* (Compare Jn. 18:28 with Jn. 13:1). The *Supper* which Jesus instituted was eaten *during* the time for the Passover. It's true that the *Meal* was called the "*Passover*" before the disciples engaged in it, but not after the meal was over. Then – after the *Supper* was over – the disciples knew it had been something different. The *Fellowship (Agape) Meal* and *Feet Washing* were dropped generally by churches during the Fourth Century A.D., but the early Brethren at Schwarzenau revived the practice.

Communion

The climaxing part of the Love Feast experience is the *Communion of the Bread and the Cup*. It is the high point of the service because it symbolizes the central fact of the Gospel – the sacrifice which Jesus made to atone for our sins. In the Upper Room, Jesus took a piece of bread, blessed it and broke it, saying, "*Take and eat; this is my body*" (Mat. 26:26). Afterwards he took the cup, gave thanks, and asked the disciples to partake of it, declaring: "*Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins*" (Mat. 26:27-28). By eating the bread and drinking the cup, we remember Christ's broken and bruised body and His shed blood on the cross of Calvary (I Cor. 11:24-25). We recognize that the wrath of God which was poured out on Jesus should have been heaped upon us!

Anointing for Healing

James 5:13-18 describes a ministry on behalf of the sick. The word "*sick*" in verse 14 is a Greek word that simply means "*to lose strength*." Because there are many experiences in life that cause us to "*lose strength*," anointing isn't only for physical healing, but can be used for emotional, relational, marital, etc. situations as well. The one being anointed places the entire situation into the Lord's hands, asking that God's will be done. In an anointing service, James 5:13-18 is read and there is an opportunity for the confession of sin. Then a few drops of oil are placed on the forehead of the one being anointed, and prayer is offered on his or her behalf – for the forgiveness of sins – for the strengthening of faith – and for healing (whatever the situation may be). There is no magic in the oil itself, but simply serves as a symbol of God's presence and the Holy Spirit's power.

Laying on of Hands

The laying on of hands symbolizes the coming of the Holy Spirit in a new or renewed way upon believers. Being Biblicists, our congregation uses the laying on of hands at the time of baptism (Acts 19:5-6), acknowledging the convert's need of the Lord's help as they begin the Christian life. When a person calls for the anointing service (see *Anointing for Healing* above), the ministers use the laying on of hands, asking for the God's healing touch and for His will to be done (Js. 5:13-18). The laying on of hands is also used when one is being initiated into a church office – as a deacon or minister (Acts 6:1-6; I Tim. 4:14), asking for the Holy Spirit's power to help carry out the duties of the office.