

Historic **lovefeast** brings together ecumenical partners



Nearly one thousand Lutherans, Episcopalians and Moravians gathered in Central Moravian Church in Bethlehem, Pa. for a unique celebration of the full communion relationship among the three denominations—the first-ever of its kind.

The celebration arose out of several years of conversation among the heads of the local territories of the three denominations: the Rt. Rev. Paul V. Marshall, bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Bethlehem, the Rev. Samuel R. Zeiser, bishop of the Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, and the Rev. David Bennett,

president of the Eastern District, Northern Province, of the Moravian Church. Their discussions of ways to demonstrate full communion led to the question of what the three churches have in common. One clear answer: Music.

After considering an area-wide hymn sing, the Rev. Dr. David Schattschneider, president of the Moravian Music Foundation, suggested that the 24th Moravian Music Festival being planned by the foundation could provide a framework for an ecumenical celebration. The opening event of the festival is a lovefeast, a traditional Moravian service of song. It offered an ideal platform for celebrating the musical traditions that both unite the churches and lift up their diversity.

Musicians from the three denominations picked anthems and hymns that are representative of their faith traditions. Choir members were recruited from churches throughout northeastern Pennsylvania, as well as from festival participants coming from across the country.

The service was preceded by a performance of Moravian chorales by a trombone choir playing from the belfry of Central Moravian Church. Since the earliest days of the Moravian Church, trombone or brass ensembles have announced festivals and special events, and the full communion partners were greeted resoundingly by this typical Moravian sound.

The Rt. Rev. C. Hopeton Clennon, Moravian bishop and senior pastor of Central Moravian Church, welcomed the congregation and offered prayers. Liturgical portions of the simple service were led by Bishop Marshall and Bishop Zeiser. Three musicians shared in conducting and accompanying the choir: Linda Maule of Messiah Lutheran Church, Bethlehem; Gwyneth Michel of College Hill Moravian Church, Bethlehem; and J. Clinton Miller of the Episcopal Church of the Mediator, Allentown.

In keeping with Moravian lovefeast custom, the congregation joined in hymns while sugar cookies and mugs of coffee were passed down the pews. When all had been served, the choir sang while the worshipers shared the simple food.



The anthems reflected the history and character of the participating churches. Johann Sebastian Bach's "Now Thank We All Our God" showcased the musical harmonies and theological truths familiar to Lutherans. A Moravian chorale for double chorus, "Come Thank Now Jehovah," brought energy and warmth. And Alec Rowley's "Praise," addressed "To the Master of music and loveliness," captured an Anglican sense of mystery, beauty and power. Over a hundred singers from more than twenty congregations participated.

The Lovefeast is often described as somewhere between Holy Communion and a church picnic. Fittingly, the mood of this ecumenical service was a combination of festival worship and family reunion. One of the choir directors summed it up, telling the choir to sing out because the final anthem was the reason we were there: "One Faith, One Hope, One Lord."