

College Books Set Aside For Moravian Lovefeast

The days of compulsory chapel are gone at most universities, but one religious tradition continues to have mass appeal for students at Wake Forest University. Two-thirds of the student body set aside their books for a ceremony that marks the beginning of the Christmas season — the Moravian lovefeast.

The tradition honors the custom of early Christians who broke bread together to signify their union, fellowship and love. In 1727, the Moravian church revived the practice of sharing a simple meal, calling it a lovefeast. The Moravians brought the tradition to Winston-Salem in 1753; Wake Forest adopted it more than 200 years later.

"This is a Winston-Salem tradition we have made our own — a peaceful pause in the hectic weeks between Thanksgiving and Christmas," said Ed Christman, university chaplain.

Students look forward to the annual event.

"The lovefeast is a time when the Wake Forest community leaves behind the things of this world to come together and focus on the true meaning of Christmas," said senior Tim McSwain.

The night of the service, luminaries light the pathway to the steps of Wait Chapel. Carillon ring a cheerful greeting as winter chill is left outside.

A 200-point Moravian star, hanging in the chapel chancel welcomes students, faculty and administrators.

The paper stars were first made in Germany in 1850 to serve as reminders of the star that led the wise men to the child in Bethlehem. Red-skirted beeswax candles are given to each person who enters the chapel. The tradition began during a lovefeast in Germany in 1741, when Johannes von Watteville gave children candles trimmed with red ribbons.

The clear tones of trumpets and French horns reach to the back row of the balcony, where the last guests take their seats. Expectant murmurs ruffle through the crowd as the final notes fade away and a local Moravian minister reads a passage of scripture. Heads bow for a prayer. Handbells sound a prelude for the advent meditation delivered by the chaplain.

"Dieters," or servers, then distribute cups of coffee and baskets of sweet buns, while the congregation fills the air with familiar carols.

The Moravian blessing is given: "Come, Lord Jesus, our guest to be,

and bless these gifts bestowed by Thee," and the gathering of 2,400 share the lovefeast.

Afterward, the lights are slowly dimmed. The advent wreath candle becomes a focal point of light in the darkness. Two dieters light their candle from the single flame and pass it on. Candle by candle, the light spreads to illuminate the chapel. Uprturned faces reflect the warm glow.

The choir sings the opening phrases of the Moravian hymn *Morning Star* and the congregation echoes the song. Everyone stands to sing *Joy to the World*. Candles are raised and held aloft for the last stanza.

Then, all is quiet. "Students walk out with hands curved protectly around the flame," Christman said. "There is a mystery and majesty that people want to take with them."

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