



COVID-19 safe alternatives for Maundy Thursday

March 2021

Key theological elements of the ritual/tradition to celebrate:

- Foot washing in Jesus' time was a necessary social practice when visiting homes.
- It was considered an extremely lowly job.
- Jesus washed his disciples' feet as an act of humility, servanthood and love, and a reminder that we are called to take up the way of Jesus—a life of service to the other, and of challenging the social and cultural norms of the day that excluded those on the margins.

Key COVID-19 safe restrictions to hold in tension:

- No physical touch;
- Maintain physical distancing;
- If it is absolutely necessary to be close, all participants must use a mask and sanitiser;
- Restrict movement in large groups, particularly when there is a ticketed seating arrangement.

Options to consider – *continue/re-imagine/refrain*

1. **Continue with the tradition within COVID-19 limits:** If keeping the ritual/tradition the same as it has always been is enough to outweigh the efforts to make it “COVID-19 safe” as it is, then here are some practicalities:
 - a. Both people to be masked;
 - b. Wear gloves and use anti-bacterial wipes, or wash with water and anti-bacterial soap.
2. **Re-imagine the tradition:** Can the meaning behind the original ritual be kept while doing something different that doesn't involve touch or physical proximity? In other words, can COVID-19 restrictions be an opportunity to re-imagine the tradition and focus on the purpose of the ritual as a symbol of serving another and challenging social and cultural norms. All suggestions below can be done in person and/or virtually.
 - a. Simply inviting people to take off their shoes during worship can be enough to challenge and discomfort us as we participate in the Holy Week readings.
 - b. Provide liturgy resources for foot washing to occur in the home with family. This could even be done collectively while on Zoom/online:
 - i. [Maundy Thursday Prayer Station – Individual](#)
 - ii. [Maundy Thursday Prayer Station - Family.](#)
 - c. Consider what are other ways to serve another in a very ordinary and counter-cultural way:
 - i. Provide a meal;
 - ii. Send a card with a prayer;
 - iii. Offer to pick up groceries, mow the lawn, hang out washing, bring in the wheelie bin.
 - d. Tapping into Peter's refusal to have Jesus wash his feet, why not consider what other social and cultural traditions, practices and behaviours exist in our time that make us feel uncomfortable and challenge our view of what's “right and proper”. Are there marginalised people we could get to know? Are there people who have hurt us that we could reach out to? Are there people who think and act differently to us who we could invite for coffee and conversation?
3. **Refrain from the act of foot washing altogether and instead focus on prayer and reflection about the cost of discipleship that Jesus calls us to.**

Contact: Synod Office COVID-19 team – COVID19@ucaql.com.au.