

PHAMBILI!

(Onwards!)

***Celebrating our Methodist Heritage
in Southern Africa***

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Using this material

The material in this booklet is intended for small group study by members of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa. It is published to coincide with the Year of Heritage, launched at the Conference of 2016. It is not a 'Bible Study' as such, although it is hoped that the Scripture references mentioned in the text will be read during the group discussion. It is rather designed to give Methodists the opportunity to reflect on where we have come from, the events and experiences that have shaped us in the past and continue to do so in the present, and the legacy we in our turn want to leave for those who follow us. The title PHAMBILI! means "onward" or "moving forward" and has been chosen to stress the fact that examining our heritage is not just a backward looking thing, but should motivate us in turn to contribute towards the heritage that others receive from us. Ideally, each person in the group should have their own copy of the material in order to make their own notes and fill in their own responses to some of the questions.

The expectation is that the material will be used in the period between Easter and Pentecost (which incorporates Aldersgate), though this is not essential. For those who want to go a little deeper, some of the lessons include suggested books or booklets which may be obtained from **Christian Connexion** stores.

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1. A Brief History

Aim:

To gain some clarity on where we have come from as a Methodist people.

Introductory exercise:

Make sure everyone in the group knows everyone else. Let each person share two things about themselves that they think no one else in the group will know.

Notes:

Eighteenth century England was undergoing an upheaval on numerous fronts. The revolution in agriculture disrupted traditional ways of life and drove large numbers of people off the land and into the cities where the growing Industrial Revolution offered employment, but where slum conditions quickly became a serious issue. Amongst many of the educated and wealthy classes, what came to be called “The Enlightenment” – a period of rigorous intellectual activity in which ‘reason’ was given pride of place – created an intellectual snobbery where religion was treated with increasing scepticism. The established church of the day was complacent and out of touch with the vast majority of the people.

This was the context into which John Wesley was born in 1703, the 15th of 19 children born to Samuel and Susannah Wesley. His brother Charles was born 4 years later. Samuel was an Anglican priest who at the time of John’s birth, was appointed to Epworth. Susannah was a remarkable woman who left an indelible imprint on the lives of her children.

There were several key moments in John Wesley’s life that shaped him for his future ministry.

- When he was 5 years old, he was miraculously saved from a burning

rectory at Epworth. His mother believed that he had been spared for some special purpose, and Wesley himself spoke of being a “brand plucked from the burning” (Zech 3:2).

- Both John and Charles attended Oxford University, where they met regularly with a group of students to study the Bible, pray, hold each other accountable, visit the prisons and help the poor. They called themselves “the Holy Club”, but their orderly and disciplined lifestyle earned them the nickname “Methodists” – a name eventually adopted as a badge of honour.
- Despite his disciplined devotion and desire to serve God, John remained uncertain as to whether he was doing enough to satisfy God. In an effort to “do more”, he and Charles went as missionaries to the American colony of Georgia – a venture which enjoyed little success, and left John feeling even more discouraged.
- On 24th May 1738, John went to a meeting in Aldersgate Street, London, where he underwent the “warmed heart” experience that changed him from an uncertain, discouraged missionary into the inspired leader of a movement which gave rise to the Evangelical Revival in 18th century England, and spread to all corners of the globe.

John Wesley’s experience helped him to understand that we are saved not by performing good deeds, but by grace. God has done all that is necessary to save us; our part is simply to ‘accept that we are accepted’ – which could be one possible definition of ‘faith’. This personal act of faith will then, out of gratitude and love, lead to good deeds.

John’s ministry was not received with any great enthusiasm by the established Church of England of the day. He was forced to preach outdoors, where he was heard gladly by the poor, who responded to his preaching in large numbers. Despite opposition, the movement grew, fed and sustained by the hymns of Charles and the ‘societies’ and ‘classes’ established for the purpose of nurturing the faith of the new converts.

John never intended the Methodist movement to separate from the Church of England. He lived and died an Anglican priest. He wanted Methodism to be a ‘movement’ within the established church, “raised up by God to

spread scriptural holiness throughout the land". However, rifts which had begun to develop by the end of Wesley's life, led to the eventual separation into an autonomous Methodist Church.

Methodism took hold and spread initially because:

1. Wesley had a unique gift for organisation. His converts were not left to fend for themselves. They were organised into 'Societies' and 'Classes'.
2. This created a sense of community amongst Methodists who came to value adequate mutual support and accountability.
3. Wesley placed trust in lay leadership. He could not be in all places at once, but he delegated pastoral care – and ultimately preaching responsibilities as well – to local lay people.
4. Methodists learned to live out the Wesleyan dictum: "There is no holiness but social holiness". Personal piety was matched by fellowship with other Christ followers and involvement in the needs of others.

Southern Africa

Methodism came to South Africa with English soldiers during the British occupations of the Cape in the early 19th century. The Rev Barnabas Shaw arrived at Cape Town with his wife Jane in 1816. After a disagreement with the Governor he moved north into Namaqualand, where he established the first Methodist mission station at Lilyfontain. From there he directed mission work into what is now Botswana and Namibia – the latter venture costing the lives of Rev William Threlfall and his Nama companions, Rev Jacob Links and Evangelist Johannes Jager.

The arrival of the 1820 Settlers in the Eastern Cape brought a number of Methodists, who were cared for by their chaplain, Rev William Shaw (no relation of Barnabas). Under Shaw's guidance, a chain of mission stations was established throughout the Eastern Cape, many of which still function today.

While William Shaw was busy with this, missionaries from the Cape crossed the Orange River to evangelise the regions beyond. In 1823 Samuel Broadbent and Thomas Hodgson settled with the Barolong at Maquassi. Unfortunately, the station was destroyed in 1824.

In 1842 James Archbell launched the mission to Natal and shortly after that, James Allison initiated work in Swaziland. Some time later, the work expanded from Natal into the then Transvaal and Mozambique.

From the beginning, education played an important part in the development of the Methodist work. By 1930 there were more than 1000 Methodist day schools. The best known of these was Healdtown, where Nelson Mandela completed his schooling. Sadly, the infamous Bantu Education Act of 1953 began to change all that, and the Church lost control of the majority of these educational institutions.

Amongst the first indigenous people to make a contribution to the expansion of Methodism in Southern Africa we should remember names such as Charles Pamla (first African Superintendent minister), Daniel Msimang (Swaziland), Robert Mashaba (Mozambique), Samuel Mathabathe (the then Northern Transvaal area), David Mogatle (the then Western Transvaal) plus many others who opened doors for the spread of the gospel. (Perhaps you could research some names of those who made an impact in your region.)

In 1883, all Methodist work south of the Vaal River became autonomous from the mother church in England and in 1933 the various strands of Methodism in South Africa united to become the Methodist Church of South Africa.

For discussion

1. If anyone has visited Namaqualand, let them describe the arid, hilly terrain. Share with one another what it must have been like for a young Englishman and his wife to travel by ox wagon some 500 km into the unknown. Consider the commitment, determination and faith of the young couple.
2. Which aspect of the above history – if any – do you find most interesting/inspiring/challenging?
3. How do you understand ‘grace’? Some people say that stressing grace makes good deeds and good behaviour unnecessary. How would you answer them? (Eph 2:8-10)

4. Wesley said "There is no holiness but social holiness". What does this mean? Is there a Bible passage that comes to mind?
5. Is there anything we should learn from the four reasons suggested above as to why Methodism took hold and spread?

Books from Christian Connexion stores with a particular bearing on the above:

Wesley's World by Arthur Attwell (Wesley Society booklet No 2)

And are we yet alive? by Peter Storey

A Spark of Grace by Donald Cragg

Open Doors by Donald Cragg and Joan Millard

Mission Namaqualand by Joan Millard Jackson

Never a Young Man ed. Celia Sadler

Healdtown: Under the eagle's wings by Trevor Webster

2. The Wesleyan emphases

Aim:

To appreciate the special contribution that the Methodist Church can make to the Church universal through the preservation of the Wesleyan emphases.

Notes:

There are certain basic truths held by all orthodox Christians, and these are summarised in the traditional Creeds such as the Apostle's Creed and the Nicene Creed. These truths include things like: God as Creator, God as love, the fact of sin, the deity of Christ, the saving effects of his life, death and resurrection, the work of the Holy Spirit, the role of the Church, and our ultimate destiny. These are truths that the Methodist Church holds in common with other Christian churches.

But there are four special emphases that we believe God has entrusted to the people called Methodist. Traditionally they are summarised as "The Four Alls" (or perhaps the Five Alls – see later).

ALL people need to be saved. A look around us will make it pretty clear that human beings have fallen out of relationship with God, each other and the earth itself. This 'falling out of relationship' is what the Bible calls 'sin'. Sin has infected every human being. We are all complicit and none of us can escape the consequences of sin. Sin cuts us off from God (Is 59:2) and since God is the source of all life, sin results ultimately in eternal death (Rom 6:23). No matter how hard we may try to be good and earn God's favour, the fact remains that all of us are flawed human beings in need of rescue from the consequences of sin.

All people CAN be saved. This is good news. Not just a select few, or those who have been somehow predestined, but *all* can be saved. No one is beyond the reach of God's love. No one is excluded from God's grace.

We are often all too ready to exclude people from God's grace. Horrific acts perpetrated against innocent people, selfish exploitation of vulnerable people, corrupt self-enrichment at the expense of others, thoughtless destruction of the environment – we find it difficult to accept that those involved in such things can be saved. We often struggle even to believe that those of other faiths, or people living by moral standards different from our own are able to be included amongst those to be saved. Truth be told, sometimes the vengeful spirit in us doesn't want such people to be saved. But ... God's grace is such that all people *can* be saved. Which is just as well, for it means that I too am included! All that is needed is a simple response to God's love. And let's be clear, the fact that all people can be saved does not mean that all deserve to be saved – in fact the contrary is true. No one deserves it, not even me! Thanks be to God for God's limitless grace!

All people can KNOW that they are saved. This is known as the doctrine of Assurance. God does not leave us in a state of doubt or fear regarding the reality of our salvation. It is not spiritual pride to claim that we know we are saved. There are at least three sources of our assurance. The inner witness of the Holy Spirit (Rom 8:16); the promises of God – and the fact that God keeps God's promises (look up for example John 3:16, John 6:37, 1 John 1:9); the growth within us of the 'fruits of the Spirit' (Gal 5:22,23) is evidence that God is at work within us. The experience of sin forgiven and peace with God is a special characteristic of Methodism.

All people can be saved to the UTTERMOST. This doctrine is sometimes known as Christian Perfection or Perfect Love. It saves us from complacency and points us towards our ultimate goal – to become like Jesus. It implies ongoing growth towards maturity (Eph 4:13) as the Holy Spirit does his work within us (Gal 5:22,23). It does not imply that we will never make mistakes, but does make the point that not only forgiveness, but goodness is the gift of God through Jesus Christ. We are being remade into new people (2 Cor 5:17). There is always something new to learn and experience. There should always be some kind of 'growing edge' in us as we grow up into the Christ-likeness that is our calling (Eph 4:11-16).

All people shall WITNESS to their salvation. This fifth emphasis was added a little later but has its roots in the evangelical character of early Methodism. Every Methodist was expected, in word and deed, in attitude and behaviour, to bear witness to the life-changing nature of their new life in Christ, and to seek opportunities to lead others into a life of faith. Have we lost that evangelical zeal today?

For discussion:

1. Have copies of the Apostle's and/or Nicene Creed available. Read the Creed together. Discuss any points that arouse special interest or controversy.
2. How do you explain to a 'good, decent and generous' person that they still need to be saved?
3. Are there some people that you really struggle to believe can be saved? Who are they, and why do you think you feel this way?
4. Should it make any difference to us to 'know that we are saved'?
5. Can you think of any other scriptural promises in which to ground your sense of assurance?
6. Can you identify any 'growing edge' in yourself at the moment? Make a note of it here and then share with the group. _____

7. That passage in Ephesians 4:11-16 suggests that it is not only individuals who need to grow towards maturity, but the body of Christ as well. Can you identify any 'growing edge' in the Christian community of which you are a part? (Congregation or small group)
8. What do you think of the "Fifth All"? How important is it to include it as a 'Wesleyan Emphasis'?
9. Do any hymns come to mind as you think of any of the 'Five Alls'?

Books from Christian Connexion with a bearing on the above:
What Wesley Believed and Taught by Arthur Attwell (Wesley Society booklet No. 1)
Wesley: a plain man for plain people by Leonard D Hulley

3. Wesleyan Spirituality (1)

Aim:

To create an awareness of the balance to be found in a truly Wesleyan-type of spirituality.

Introductory exercise:

There are a number of traditional spiritual disciplines, designed to develop a relationship with God and increase a 'God-awareness' within us. Make a note here of as many of these disciplines of which you are aware, and then circle those you have found especially helpful. Share your experiences with the group.

Notes:

Is there such a thing as a peculiarly 'Wesleyan spirituality'? Probably not, at least in the sense of particular methods or the use of specific spiritual disciplines (although Wesley did lay special emphasis on prayer, the study of the scriptures, fasting and Holy Communion). The simple fact though, is that people are different and different individuals will find different methods helpful. Nevertheless, it *is* surely true to say that there is a 'Wesleyan spirituality' in terms of the *outcomes* of whatever practices are followed.

A truly Wesleyan spirituality, regardless of the actual practices used, has always led to a certain balance in the way the Christian life is lived. Over the next couple of weeks, we will examine some of this balance in more detail.

The balance between the personal and the social. Yes it is true that there needs to be a personal response to the grace of God, but that does not mean that one's life of faith is a private, inward looking thing. Personal commitment to the Lordship of Jesus is where it all begins, but it certainly

doesn't end there. A personal commitment that doesn't issue in outward-looking concern and action is always incomplete. For Wesley, works of piety – i.e. the practices of personal devotion – went hand-in-hand with works of mercy – responding to the needs, both spiritual and physical, of others. Withdrawal from the world and its needs is simply not an option. If God loves the world – and everyone in it – so must we. This is why compassionate social action in the service of God and humanity is not an optional extra for Christians. It is just as important as private prayer and Bible study. Keeping the balance is the Wesleyan way.

The balance between the individual and the corporate. Wesley is reputed to have said that there is no such thing as a solitary Christian. There are those who say “I can be a perfectly good Christian without being part of a church”. For Wesley that is a fallacy and is one reason why from the outset, Wesley organised people into societies, bands and classes. He was convinced that the Christian life was never intended to be an individualistic thing. After all, even Jesus chose to have a group around him. While there is certainly a place for solitude and contemplation, very few are able to adopt it as a permanent lifestyle. We need others to nourish and sustain our discipleship. We need to learn from each other. We need the insights and experience of others to prevent us from going off at a tangent in some way. We need their care and encouragement when things get tough. We need others to “Hold the Christ-light for us in the night-time of our fear”. We need the inspiration of uplifting corporate worship. We need the wisdom and counsel of others when we are confused and uncertain. We need the power and strength afforded by the united action of a community in countering the social evils of our day – many people working together will always accomplish more than one individual. And for an effective ministry and witness in the world, we need the different gifts and talents to be found in a community of God's people. No one individual – not even St Paul himself – has all the gifts needed to make this world what God intends it to be. We need each other. Each individual matters. Each has a role to play, but we are far more effective when we are able to work together. And that was the principle that undergirded the Wesleyan way.

For discussion:

1. How would you define the concept of “spirituality”?
2. How did Jesus model the balanced spirituality described above? Think of examples in his life which illustrate the balance.
3. Can one be a Christian and not be part of the Church? Explain the reason for your answer.
4. Read 1 Corinthians 12:1-11. Do you think you have any particular ‘spiritual gift’? (See also Romans 12:4-8 and Ephesians 4:11-13)
5. What is meant by “The Priesthood of all believers”? (Something that has always been stressed in Methodism.) Can you see the link between this concept and the ‘balanced’ spirituality outlined above?
6. Read 1 Corinthians 12:12-27. How does this ‘body’ imagery illustrate the necessary balance between the individual and the corporate?

Books from Christian Connexion with a bearing on the above:

Our Methodist Roots by Peter Storey

Rediscovering Wesley for Africa (the chapter on ‘Wesleyan Spirituality’ by Trevor Hudson)

Wesleyan Spirituality by Dion Foster (Wesley Society booklet No. 6)

4. Wesleyan Spirituality (2)

Aim:

To create an awareness of the balance to be found in a truly Wesleyan-type of spirituality.

Notes:

The balance between heart and mind. Wesley's heart was set aflame by his Aldersgate experience. From then on, there was nothing lukewarm about him. He developed a passionate enthusiasm for his Lord that was a bit too much for the staid church of his day, to the extent that he was barred from preaching in most pulpits. But he knew that a heart aflame was not enough; we are also told to love God with our minds (Matt 22:37) and Paul spoke of the worship of mind and heart (Rom 12:2). Wesley took seriously the intellectual element of Christian faith. For him, Scripture was the ultimate authority. But that did not mean that reason, experience and tradition had no part to play. He may have been a "man of one book", but he read widely in other literature as well. He required his largely uneducated preachers to study for five hours a day. For him it was important to know, not just *what* we believe, but *why* we believe it. The simple truth is that we need both heart *and* mind. Passion without brains can be dangerous. Intellect without heart can be cold and sterile. Once again, a Wesleyan spirituality points to the need for balance.

The balance between faith and works. Wesley's Aldersgate experience had taught him that salvation was by faith alone. But that did not mean one could sit back with one's 'ticket to heaven' and think that all righteousness had been fulfilled. One could not pray "Thy kingdom come; thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven" and do nothing to co-operate with God in answering that prayer. There was work to be done. And anyway, as James 2:14-26 makes clear, any 'faith' not backed up by works is unlikely to be the real thing. Faith will always have a practical outworking. When one begins to appreciate what God in Christ has done for us, there will be a

response of gratitude that will lead to good works and a desire to serve this God. 'Obedience' becomes a key word – not out of grim duty, but out of love. We can never earn our salvation by performing good deeds, but we shouldn't think that 'faith', without some form of practical expression, is going to earn our salvation either. As with all true Wesleyan spirituality, the two hold together in balance.

The Methodist 'Rule of Life'. John Wesley defined a "Rule of Life" for his new converts, something we would do well to bear in mind today. It is summarised like this:

- *Doing no harm*, avoiding evil of every kind, especially that which is more generally practised.
- *Doing good* by being merciful after one's own power, doing good of every possible sort to the bodies of people as well as to their souls and, as far as possible, to all.
- *Attending upon all the ordinances of God* – more simply expressed in today's language as 'Staying in love with God'. This referred to keeping up the practices that would develop one's relationship with God, in particular: public worship, participating in Holy Communion, private prayer and the study of the Scriptures, staying in fellowship with other Christians.

In this "Rule of Life" we will find encapsulated all the balances implicit in a Wesleyan spirituality.

For discussion:

1. Considering your own spiritual experience, are you more of a heart or mind Christian?
2. With what 'good works' are you currently involved? Since some may be confidential or things you would prefer to keep private, share with the group only what you are comfortable to share.
3. How do you come to terms with 'salvation by faith alone' on the one hand, and 'faith without works is dead' on the other?

4. Where, for you, is the biggest challenge in maintaining the balances in a Wesleyan spirituality?
5. How helpful do you find the 'Rule of Life' as a simple summary of a 'Wesleyan Spirituality'?

Books from Christian Connexion with a bearing on the above:

The same books as mentioned in the previous lesson, plus

Three Simple Rules that will change the world by Ruben Job.

5. Embracing our heritage

Aim:

To encourage group members to adopt a positive attitude towards their own congregation/group, to celebrate what has been good in the past, while considering the legacy they are leaving for future generations.

Introductory exercises

These exercises will form a significant part of this session, so allow enough time for everyone to participate.

1. Ask a long-standing member to give a 5 minute outline of the history of this congregation. If he/she is able to do so, ask them to identify any key moments that have influenced the ongoing life of the congregation.
2. Then allow time for each group member to answer the following questions and share their responses in the group.

How long have you been a member of this congregation? _____

What positive memories do you have of your time here? _____

3. It is always easier to criticise when things are not exactly as we would like them to be, while when things are good – or at least satisfactory – we tend to take them for granted. So, focusing now on the positive, what things are going well in your congregation at present? What aspects of congregational life are you appreciating? List them here and share with the group.

Spend a short time in prayer together, giving thanks for the people, events and experiences that have contributed in a positive way to the life of your congregation.

Notes:

John Wesley’s Aldersgate experience impacted the rest of his life, but that experience was only the beginning of the heritage that he and his many successors have left us. You have been considering some of the key, perhaps defining moments in the history of your own congregation. Some of these may be very significant moments indeed, well worth celebrating; things that have made a huge impact on the development of your congregation. And while we celebrate them, we know that growth and development must continue. And we are now the people who will determine what kind of congregation ours becomes in the future. We too have a legacy to leave that will become part of the heritage to be inherited by our children.

For discussion

1. It’s easy to criticise the church, the leaders, the minister, what is and isn’t happening. Make a (hopefully brief) list of areas where you feel your congregation is currently falling short (the negatives). And then make a list of positive suggestions that you think could help to address those issues. Share with the group.

Negatives: _____

Positives: _____

2. Thinking of your local congregation, what would you like it to look like in 20 years’ time? Don’t be afraid to dream a little. Describe the ideal heritage you would like the next generation to inherit from you. Share with the group.

3. From the issues raised in the previous question, can the group agree on two or three special characteristics that would define the legacy you want to leave behind? Which are the most important? _____

6. Leaving our Legacy

Aim:

To encourage group members to consider the legacy they would like to bequeath to those who will follow, and to plan to ensure that this will be more than just vague hopes and good intentions.

Notes:

At least half of this week's session will involve trying to translate the good intentions of last week's discussion into something a little more concrete. The final two discussion questions last week asked you to describe the kind of church you would like to leave for the next generation to inherit, and then to agree on two or three special things that would characterise the legacy you leave behind. So now, focus on those two or three things on which the group agreed. Write them down here.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Now take 5-10 minutes for individual, silent reflection. What would need to happen for these ideals to be realised? Make a couple of notes and be prepared to share your thoughts with the group.

And now the challenge: What can you and the group do to make it happen? Be practical. Be specific. Appoint people to do specific things – and hold them accountable. Talk about it and then note it all down here, so that you have it in writing! (Things to consider may – or may not – include things like a service project within the church or your local community, innovations in worship, a special ministry to children or young people or the poor or dispossessed, a divorce or bereavement support group, prayer

ministry, all-age activities to integrate young and older members, events or activities designed to build relationships within the congregation, special educational or training courses, 'out of the box' thinking to involve new members, ways to raise the profile of your congregation in the community, ways to ensure a stable financial foundation.)

It may seem a daunting prospect. It may seem all terribly idealistic. But in this Pentecost season, remember the Holy Spirit! If you seriously believe in what you're setting out to accomplish, you may find that the Holy Spirit will surprise you. May it be so!

And now commit what you have decided to God in prayer.

Closing off:

Your group has been together for six weeks. You have developed some (hopefully good) relationships. You may like to close off this group experience with a light meal, or you could transform that meal into a Love Feast. If you choose to do so, here is one outline you could follow:

(*Note:* A Love Feast or Agape Meal is **not** Holy Communion. The idea comes from Acts 2:46 where the early disciples "broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts". The focus is on sharing and caring, not the body and blood of Jesus. The keynotes should be joy and thanksgiving.)

Opening words: John 13:34-35, followed by prayer

Song: (Sing only if the group is comfortable to do so and somebody can give a lead. If the group is uncomfortable with singing, read the words of a hymn or song together.) Possible song suggestions now and at the end include: 'All praise to our redeeming Lord', 'A new commandment', 'Bind us together Lord', 'Make me a channel of your peace', 'Brother, sister let me serve you'.

Scripture Readings: Possible suggestions: 1 Cor 13; Matt 22:34-40; 1 John 4:7-21; Rom 13:8-10.

Silence: invite the group to reflect over the last 6 weeks and call to mind special learnings, experiences and the people with whom they have shared.

Testimony from any who wish to say what these studies have meant to them, what they have learned, and/or to affirm and appreciate other members of the group.

Shared Group Prayer

The meal: This can be symbolic or a proper 'bring and share' light meal – or both, with one following the other. If symbolic, use a large piece of bread or crackers, and pass around the group, with each person breaking off a piece and giving it to their neighbour, with words such as "The food of fellowship"; "A sign of our togetherness"; "Let there be love shared among us"; "The peace of the Lord be with you".

Then pass a communal cup containing water or fruit juice from one to another, using some of the unused words above.

If a proper light meal is used, pray that this shared meal will be a sign of your life together. Then invite group members to 'dish up' for one another.

Song: (Either sing or read the words of an appropriate song or hymn)

Hold hands and say the benediction together.