

## **Thinking about our Assemblies**

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In the life of the local church, assemblies must never become routine. Assemblies are crucial opportunities for fostering disciples. When believers assemble to celebrate, we collectively experience joy and celebrate God's purpose in ways that go beyond family and individual worship or small groups. Experiencing the unity of worship offers spiritual nourishment, revitalizing members for the shared mission that is reinforced and reenergized. In the assembly, Bible teaching and insights are shared. Worshipers breathe in—gaining new insights, strengthening the commitment to follow Christ—and are then sent forth to breathe out their saving, sustaining faith.

Assembly, biblically understood, is not optional. The biblical goals of assembly are not fulfilled in scattered sub-assemblies where subsets of the church worship together apart from the gathered church. The contemporary church too often fails to emphasize the importance and necessity of being present for the assemblies of the church. The reasons for being absent are numberless, too often including alternative church events.

The Bible emphasizes the importance of assembling. In Hebrews 10:25, believers are urged not to neglect gathering but to use every opportunity to encourage and stimulate one another. Assembly and shared worship have a vital role in nurturing spiritual growth and solidarity. Assemblies play a vital role as the work of God among his people is observed and celebrated. The assemblies of the early church gained the favor of the outsiders. Others saw sharing, praise for God, renewed lives, and celebration. Those assemblies attracted new believers. Those assemblies were welcoming and transformative, drawing more and more people to Jesus. In many contemporary churches, a frequently-heard expectation is that only about half or two-thirds of the total membership will be present in the assembly of the local church on any given Sunday. And we wonder why our assemblies do not attract others! Our assemblies do not even attract us!

The assembly lets those present see and experience faith in action. Unity and shared purpose are celebrated in worship—song, Scripture, Supper, sharing.

Here is a matter worthy of prayer—leaders, elders, ministers, members. May our assemblies become dynamic times that nurture disciples and send forth believers who are spiritually fortified and mission-oriented.