

## A NUMBER OF WAYS TO CELEBRATE AN ANNIVERSARY

*Celebration stands at the very center of our lives. Sociologists, as well as Christians say that it is essential to the ongoing of our lives. It not only keeps life from being hum-drum, boring, needlessly repetitive, but it enables us to discover again and again who we are, from whence we came, and what we need to be about in our daily lives. In remembering and doing the essential works of the Faith bound up in the sacraments and in the Sunday morning liturgy, we recapture the faith.*

*But how should we celebrate? Especially something as important as a centennial? It is a tragedy that so many churches let such an important event as this go by without really celebrating, to the best of our time and ability as God gives us these. Who knows if this may be the last great anniversary we shall be present to celebrate? Who knows what economic factors, to mention but one of the important ones which determine our future, so often, may come to force our activities as a congregation to change radically or cease altogether'? It is not in fear that we should celebrate, witness to God's steadfastness, faithfulness, love and grace. And **today** we need to exercise our thanksgiving by celebrating, or planning to celebrate.*

--Norman Dow, Jr., Centennial Celebration Committee, First Presbyterian Church, Cisco, Texas. Many ideas here are ones used by First church in their celebration. Some ideas are provided by the editor.

**Write a history of your church** since its inception. You can usually find someone in your congregation who is not only about to do this, but will be glad to do it. Get help from local historical societies and libraries, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Department of History at Philadelphia and/or Montreat, teachers at local colleges or high schools, etc.

**Write a historical essay** for each issue of your newsletter, which can help heighten interest in the celebration.

**Write skits or plays** based on historical events or persons in your church. Be sure to include all age groups in the play.

**Write articles for the local newspaper** about your church and its history. Include a few photographs. Contact the religion editor or the community events editor for assistance.

**Write a series of historical "minutes"** to be presented during worship services throughout the anniversary year. It can be about events or people in the life of the church.

**Have each member, past and present, to write a brief letter** of appreciation on "What this

Church has meant to me”. Compile them in a book or in a file in the heritage room. Plan a fellowship program and read the letters.

**Have members of the congregation, past and present, write out as prayers** what their wishes are for the future of the church. Perhaps these can be used to develop a mission statement or goals for the church as it moves into the future.

**Write a brief biography of important lay leaders** in the church throughout its history. Be sure to include leaders among the youth.

**Write an anniversary hymn and/or anthem.** This can be done by the choir director, organist, a local musician or member. Learn the hymn and sing it during the anniversary year or at the actual celebration. Have the choir present the anthem at the main event.

**Invite former members of the church** to the anniversary celebration. You may have to track them down through membership rolls of other churches if they transferred their letter. Put them on the mailing list to receive special anniversary celebration information, particularly if your celebration takes place over many months. Try to house those who come to any of the events in homes of present members.

**Invite former ministers** to return to preach during the celebration year or for several Sundays before the main event or on the anniversary itself. Or hold a “stroll down memory lane” lunch where the ministers relate anecdotes from their time at the church.

**Invite church officials** in your denomination to participate in your anniversary celebration.

**Invite neighboring churches, Presbyterian and other, and their ministers** to attend your celebration or have a special program with them, highlighting mission projects and other aspects in common.

**Invite political officials** in your city, county/parish, and state to participate in your anniversary celebration.

**Invite people in the community** whose memory spans that of the history of the church, even though they may have never been a member of the church, to relate stories about events in the life of the community that may have affected the church through the years.

**Invite members of the church-sponsored Scout troop or any organization sponsored by the church** to help with and participate in the anniversary celebration. Use them as ushers, have a program with them as the focus, and/or have them sit together in the sanctuary.

**Mail out a special letter or “engraved” invitation** to all members, present and former, to attend the celebration. The invitation should be issued in the name of the session and anniversary

committee.

**Appoint an official photographer, perhaps a member of the church** to take photos during all the events, especially on the day of the main event. Try to hire a professional photographer to take pictures that day so that all members may enjoy the festivities. Have an official portrait made of all present; take one of guests only.

**In addition to still photographs, arrange to videotape** events, programs, and worship. Many members of the church may own camcorders and will probably shoot some film at some point. Hire a professional to video on the day of the main event. Have a studio splice together film of other events taken by members into an “official” celebration video for members to purchase.

**Use special colored paper** for bulletins, stationery, envelopes for the entire anniversary year, if possibly, or at least for the occasion of the event itself.

**Hold a contest for the design of an anniversary seal, slogan, and/or symbol.** Print it on all stationery and bulletins. Have special stickers made with the symbol on it.

**Hold a reception or tea** when former ministers or dignitaries (church or secular) visit the congregation in connection with the celebration. It will offer the people in the congregation and the city an opportunity to visit with these special guests and to renew old friendships.

**If your church anniversary coincides with an anniversary of some institution or political entity in the community,** try to plan a joint program to celebrate both. Also, coordinate events so that members will be able to attend functions of both celebrations.

**Hold organ recitals or chamber music programs** by well-known organists or groups in the area or members of the congregation. These can take place in the weeks before the celebration main event.

**Drape the church** (inside and out) with **banners, flags, pennants,** etc. Your banners can be of the anniversary seal or symbol, express the faith of the church through traditional symbols (the cross, manger, chalice and bread, etc.), be in the colors of the liturgical year (white, purple, green, red), express the seasons of the year, contain words as well as symbols, anything. Color adds to the festivity of the celebration.

**Don't be afraid to put a big sign or banner announcing your anniversary celebration date and time in front of the church.** It will tell your neighbors that something exciting is happening at the church.

**Dress in replicas of historical clothing of the period the church** was founded and all periods in between. Use modes of transportation of the time when possible.

**Have a “History Day” for the church and community.** Set up displays of old kitchen items, farm implements, living tools (spinning wheel, etc.). Hold demonstrations of cooking over an open fire, making candles, etc.

**Collect and display baby pictures** of members of the congregation. Hold a contest to match the baby with the member.

**Plan some fun intergenerational games and activities.** It will draw all the members of your church together.

**Cook recipes from cookbooks published by the church or other churches or that are contained in the new cookbook.** This will help promote sales if your church is printing a cookbook.

**Plan special worship services during your anniversary celebration:** have a full service of worship with the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper for the main event. During the year, write services using old styles of worship, celebrate the Lord’s Supper by the Scottish way (around a common table), Episcopal/Methodist (coming to the altar), Passover (seder), Tenebrae, etc.

**Have a “Parade of Saints” service to remember** and honor recent deceased members and/or luminaries of the Christian church. Decorate a memorial tree with their pictures and names. You can include the little children in this.

**Have members of the congregation write prayers** to be used in the worship services during the anniversary year. This always adds a dimension to the celebration which can be gained in no other way.

**Order special anniversary mementoes.** See the handout in this packet for ideas.

**Select a worthy benevolent or mission** project for the congregation to fund during the anniversary year. It can be a domestic or foreign field project or both. There must be present in the celebration of an anniversary an emphasis on reaching out to others.

**Erect and dedicate a significant memorial** (a large Celtic cross, building, etc.) on anniversary Sunday or sometime near that date. Often plans for a new building, a new wing, or some similar event can be a good way of looking forward into the future. Looking confidently into the future in the light of God’s promises and grace is a definite part of any anniversary celebration.

**Supply audio cassettes to shut-ins** and former members who cannot return for the celebration and encourage them to send greetings, general and personal, to the church on the occasion of the anniversary celebration.

**Supply audio and video recordings** of the celebration to your shut-in members and former

members so that they can share the special times.

**Invite Presbytery to hold its stated meeting at your church** during the anniversary year. It's a big project to host presbytery, so get everyone involved.

**Hold a Work Day** to spruce up the yard, plant flowers and shrubs, wash and paint the eaves, clean out the basement and attic (you might find something interesting!), paint the nursery room, etc. Have the grounds committee go around before work day and identify projects so that supplies can be purchased in advance. Do the repair work before the celebration year begins and another sprucing up before the day of the main event. You'll want the building(s) to shine for the celebration.

**Save copies of everything produced** during the anniversary celebration. File in boxes or cabinets as your church Anniversary Celebration Collection. Include any mementos ordered, all records produced by the celebration committee, photographs and negatives, posters, flyers, videos, everything. You may want to take a good representative sampling of photographs and other items and send them to the Department of History (Montreat) to have on deposit there in an anniversary celebration collection.

**Keep a scrapbook/file**, if you don't already have one, for newspaper clippings, photographs, and announcements for church events. Keep copies of all bulletins and newsletters.

**Start an oral history project with older members** of the congregation. Talk to them individually and collectively about what they remember most about the congregation. When two or more members get together, they often are catalysts for one another.

**Display all old Session minute books and registers**, women's organizations records, communion ware, and all old records of the church.

**Keep a photograph & biography file of all officers** who have served.

**Keep a photograph & biography file of all ministers who have served.** You can create a portrait gallery with these photographs.

**Establish a permanent historical committee** which will continue to collect, write, and bring significant historical material to the attention of the congregation. This committee could be responsible for appointing annually a historian of the congregation, an official photographer who is on hand at most of the functions of the church, and will care for a heritage room or the records of the church.

**Evaluate all the activities** which went on during your anniversary celebration and make recommendations to the session of the church about similar celebrations in the future. Submit a formal written report.

*These are some ideas for celebrating a church anniversary. Use your members' creativity and inspiration!*

*edited by Diana Ruby Sanderson  
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