

## **LET'S CELEBRATE CHURCH ANNIVERSARIES MEANINGFULLY**

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In years gone by the church anniversary was a 'red letter' day. Apart from anything else, it was an opportunity to listen to a guest preacher. But in many places church anniversaries are no longer celebrated. Why is this so? Is it because ministers abused the occasion by absenting themselves in order to earn a preaching fee elsewhere? Or is it because churches failed to give any thought as to how the anniversary might be meaningfully celebrated? For the fact is that there is far more to an anniversary than simply having a visiting preacher. Not that I am knocking visiting preachers – apart from anything else it is an opportunity for the church to have its horizons broadened through the visit of the Baptist Union President, a College principal, or some other representative of the wider Baptist family. But visiting preacher, however important, can ever do justice to the occasion if the sermon is not set within the context of the church's life. As one who once specialised in church anniversaries, let me say what a difference it makes if the preacher receives recent copies of the church magazine together with the annual report. Better still, let the visiting preacher know some of the issues that are bugging the church. The preacher may still be shooting in the dark, but at least he or she will know in which direction they should be facing. In this way the visiting preacher can be used by God to bring fresh vision and a sense of new direction to the church. However, the church anniversary is more than a day for looking forward, it is also a day for looking back and thanking God for his goodness in the past twelve months. So let it be a day for testimony, when one of the church leaders reminds the congregation of how God has blessed the church in the year that is past. Let individuals tell, too, of how God has blessed them over the past year as a result of belonging to the church. Alternatively, all those who have found faith in Christ over the past twelve months could be invited to stand up and remind the church afresh that Jesus has been building his church. There is yet another way in which the church anniversary can become special: this can be the day when the visiting preacher leads the church in prayer for the one couple who are often missed out in the church's public intercessions: viz the pastor and his or her spouse. Needless to say, if the church anniversary is to be a true celebration there must be more than words – there must also be tangible expressions of celebration. A church anniversary should be an excuse for a party – with cake, balloons and more beside. For the sake of the children, on this day (and hopefully many others too) church needs to be a fun place too!

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