

“Ask the Archivist”, by Paul Daniels

The Congregational Anniversary - Part 2

In addition to the thoughtful consideration of the tone and scope of the anniversary celebration, as was discussed in Part 1 of this series, it is critical to build a strong planning committee for the series of events. It is difficult to over-estimate the importance of this step in the process, as it will be the responsibility of this committee, relying on input from the pastor, other key staff and the church council, to define the tone and scope of the observance.

Committee Make-up: While it is usually the case that older church members or those who have been members of the congregation for a long-time come to mind first for service on the anniversary planning committee, it is important to think creatively about how the members of this committee will directly influence the type of events and “products” (e.g., the printed church history or the oral history interviews compiled), created by the anniversary.

It’s fair to say that we’ve all served on committees or task forces that have been less than pleasant experiences. While no one plans for this to occur, it happens for a number of avoidable reasons. One of these is asking committee members to take on demanding volunteer projects for which they have no experience and perhaps no interest. Asking people to work this way can be a recipe for frustration and disappointment.

It is preferable to build the anniversary planning committee with peoples’ particular areas of expertise and passion in mind. For instance, the person who cares deeply about the history of the congregation might work on the oral history interviewing effort or on the written history subcommittee. Likewise, the person who attends to detail well and likes organizing material could work on the archives subcommittee. Finally, the folks who create and manage events particularly well should work on the anniversary weekend worship service and gala celebration.

Committee Tasks: - The archives subcommittee will organize and make accessible the church’s story through its collection of documents, photographs, VHS and DVD materials, etc., creating material for the written or video history of the congregation - The oral history subcommittee will record the stories of church life that need to be gathered and passed on; they also serve as material for the printed or video histories. - The history subcommittee will produce the written or digital story of the congregation, using the records listed above as the basis for the narrative. - The

event subcommittee will plan the “signature events” of the anniversary celebration which might be spread over the anniversary year or more commonly concentrated on a designated weekend. They could include a festival worship service, a special celebratory meal and a series of focused reunions, e.g, choir, confirmation or Luther League gatherings. - The chairperson of the anniversary committee will support and coordinate the people and tasks listed above as effectively as possible for the best possible outcomes.

This list of anniversary tasks is only intended as a guide to what most congregations focus on for their anniversary celebrations. Congregations may take on more, or fewer, of these tasks.

Next Steps: Part 3 of this series will focus on producing the congregational history.