

SECTION E

SPECIAL EVENTS

A church, if it is growing and vital, is changing. Eras begin and end. Accomplishments need to be recognized, not to pat our backs with self-satisfaction but to recognize God's presence. Celebration is an invitation to worship.

This is one way the historian can be an agent of change. Even the youngest church can look to its denominational or local heritage with thanksgiving. As a congregation looks ahead--at a building dedication for example--the historian can record what is happening and provide perspective.

Think about these occasions for joy:

- A. **Anniversaries:** Of the founding of a congregation. Of dedication of the building. Of a pastor's ministry. Of the coming of Presbyterian settlers/missionaries.
- B. **Community celebrations and festivals.**
- C. **Regular holidays.** You are celebrating those anyway, so why not start a new tradition or use of your heritage as Presbyterians? You can also note a holiday--such as Reformation Day--your congregation has not celebrated in the past.
- D. **Conferences.**
- E. **Retreats.**
- F. **Events signalling change:** Dedication of a new musical instrument or building. Retirement of a pastor or other leader. Installation of a new pastor.

Christians shouldn't need much excuse to celebrate. Seasons of remembrance and celebration refresh and excite a congregation and stimulate worship. On the other hand, special events can overtax people. If they are poorly done they can be worse than doing nothing. Ill will can result inside and outside the church.

Start with some ground rules:

1. **When you can, plan ahead.**
2. **Involve a lot of people a little, not a few a lot.**
3. **Don't plan more than can be well done with resources and time available.** Think big enough to challenge, yet keep the flexibility to scale back as necessary.
4. **Never lose sight of why a church celebrates or does anything else.** Do all for the glory of God.

Ideas for historical celebrations:

--Church records projects.

Session and presbytery records can be researched. Letters and other materials can be collected from members and friends. This is a good time to begin a plan to microfilm, preserve, repair, and catalogue old documents books and pictures. (See the Preservation section).

--Oral histories.

Interview elderly members. The young people might make this a project. Small congregations can interview each member or family as a gift to the future.

--Publication projects:

Church histories. . .presbytery histories. . .a pamphlet introducing the church for outreach . . .a church coloring book. . . a "scrapbook" or picture book on the church. . .a cookbook . . .

--Crafts projects.

Make a quilt or design a counted cross-stitch pattern that can be reproduced. Make a banner (But be sensitive to identification of banners by some members with modernist churches.)

--Community events.

Involve neighbors in the events. Organize a clean-up and beautification effort. Invite church neighbors personally to an occasion and note those who attend. A parade float, an exhibit or a joint musical event may be possible. What is the community perception of you? These may be unique opportunities to change negative ideas. Use special celebrations to open lines of communication on problems or as new opportunities for ministry.



*"Thou hast given a banner to them that fear Thee,
that it may be displayed because of the truth," Psalm 60:4.*

The "blue banner of the covenant" has symbolized the Reformed Presbyterian Church from its earliest days in Scotland. Three years before even the summoning of the Westminster Assembly, the Scots under General Leslie, in 1640, had successfully taken the field to maintain the National Covenant of 1638 in defense of Presbyterianism. Banners are still preserved, with mottoes affirming the crown rights and royal prerogatives of Jesus Christ, which were carried in the struggles of the Covenanters against the Stuarts prior to the deposing of James II in 1688.

The belt is that of the clan badge. In former times the chief would give his followers a metal plate with his crest, fixed to the clothing by a strap and buckle. When not in use, the strap was coiled about the badge. Clansmen today engrave the stylized belt with the chief's motto; only the chief and his heir wear the crest without the surrounding strap and buckle.

Although the initial Reformed Presbyterian congregation in America was founded at Paxtang, Pa., in 1721, the Reformed Presbytery received its organization, again at Paxtang, in 1774. Since 1833 the Church has been divided into the "old light" (the R.P.C. of North America) and the "new light" (R.P.C., Evangelical Synod).



An artist in the church can add to an event by designing a logo. Above are two ways denominations used logos for an anniversary.

--**A heritage room.** This is an area designed to preserve and exhibit protected artifacts or papers. People may donate or loan important memorabilia, confident that items will be protected. The room may house an archives or library. It may simply be a hall to exhibit photos, documents or objects. See the Preservation section.

--**Special worship experiences.** Reformed life centers in worship. Design a service as one would have been conducted at your beginning, or in John Calvin's day. Write brief capsules patterned after the "Bicentennial Minute" TV feature. Do them in costume. Someone with creative talents might write a hymn, arrange an anthem, or produce a pageant or play. Produce a tape, slide, or video program. Invite special speakers, preachers or musicians.

--**Evangelistic outreach.** Use the observance as a springboard to evangelism, a lay renewal, or new Bible studies or services. Take advantage of a child's natural interest in dress-up, games and toys. A Bible school might be possible, with simple hats or pioneer items for the children to use and play in each day. Use a heritage theme for Gospel talks. Books on clothing and games can be found at the library. Pioneer toys were simple and might be made as crafts. State historical societies have information about pioneer life in your area, and maybe some good programs, handouts, and films. Use elderly members as story tellers.

--**Stewardship.** Create an endowment or special fund for a specific purpose. Evaluate giving and its philosophy based on the history of your congregation's benevolences and ministries.

--**Looking ahead.** A celebration is a time to assess past and present ministries. Sponsor discussion meetings. Create a master plan or a long-range planning committee. The statement of purpose in the by-laws should be "dusted off" and used or rewritten.

--**Ethnic heritage.** Once churches were monolithic and served communities without much diversity. Celebration planners should remember that today's church may be far different from yesterday's. Or, it may not have changed so much as the surrounding community. This makes a great opportunity and some danger.

It is an opportunity to inform today's church about their founders. The message of unity in the Body of Christ, though, can be lost if a group comes off sounding chauvinistic. Be careful of hinting: "It was OUR people who began here." Also, don't leave out anyone. For example, it is easy to overlook slaves who were once vital to the life and ministry of many congregations. If their story is not told or is mishandled blacks around you may take offense. Not telling the story may leave a wrong impression. An accurate, sensitive cross-cultural celebration builds bridges. Seek advice from people of other racial and ethnic cultures if what you are doing will effect them.

Planning to Celebrate:

These ideas are just some of the forms a church celebration can take. We've heard of churches who celebrated their national origins with a parade of flags from all the countries represented in their membership. Other churches have planned area or even world tours of significant historical spots.

One thing in common with celebrations that work is that they are planned many months in advance. Two years is not too long. If a major writing project is conceived, requiring much research, five years is reasonable.

Set a calendar which includes deadlines for specific details to be completed and dates and times for events within the celebration. Watch out for conflicts with these dates, not only within the church but in the community. Try to remain flexible enough with this calendar that conflicts can be resolved if they arise.

Unveil the plan at a congregational meeting. At this event the congregation might be broken into groups, conducted by members of the steering committee, to field questions and brainstorm ideas. Reporters from these groups could then share ideas with the whole body and plans made to incorporate them into the plan. A resulting final plan and calendar can then be set, on which there has been maximum church involvement.

Based on the final plan a budget should be set. Make sure those involved know exactly how much they have to spend and what expenditures need to be approved in advance, and by whom.

Task forces, representing as many as are available and are interested should then be appointed. These would include:

- a. One or more coordinators to keep in touch with how things are going.
- b. Arrangements committees for individual projects.
- c. A congregational involvement person to make sure the church is informed and participating. In some cases another person may be needed for the neighborhood.
- d. One person to work with newspapers, radio and TV.

During the planning and implementation of a celebration, be sure to take plenty of pictures and keep all planning materials. Archive these details. They will help you look back on the events, evaluate their effectiveness, avoid mistakes in the future, and help other churches do similar projects. The PCA Archives would appreciate ideas to pass along to others.

On the next page is a planning worksheet the steering committee might use to get things started.

PLAN TO CELEBRATE

Goals we want to accomplish (List by priority):

Goal	Reason for goal
1.	
2.	
3.	
4.	

We believe these specific objectives will help meet our goals:

Objectives to reach Goal #1	Objectives to reach Goal #2
1.	1.
How will this help reach Goal #1?	How will this help reach goal #2?
How will we measure success?	How will we measure success?
2.	2.
How will this help reach Goal #1?	How will this help reach Goal #2?
How will we measure success?	How will we measure success?

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Objectives to reach
Goal #3

1. _____

How will this help reach Goal #3? _____

How will we measure success? _____

2. _____

How will this help reach Goal #3? _____

How will we measure success? _____

Objectives to reach
Goal #4

1. _____

How will this help reach goal #4? _____

How will we measure success? _____

2. _____

How will this help reach Goal #4? _____

How will we measure success? _____

Set up a sheet of paper for each objective. On this sheet answer the questions:

1. What events, projects, and activities will meet this objective?
2. What do you expect each activity to accomplish?
3. What do you expect each activity to cost in time, effort, and money?
4. Is the cost justified if the activity accomplishes its objective?
5. Should events be organized by committees? Task forces? Individual?
Who should this person or group answer to?

On the basis of this information, make a working plan. Review it:

1. Does it fit into a unified whole?
2. What are its strengths and weaknesses?
3. Does it have a definite starting and ending point?
4. Does it meet your goals and bring glory to God?

Exhibits and Displays

One way to involve people in the story of your church is to personalize that story in an exhibit.

There has been a revolution in museums in recent decades, in philosophy and technology. In philosophy, people who design exhibits strain to make the onlooker a participant. History is more than artifacts on a shelf behind locked glass. It is living. . .breathing. . .relevant. It should never be more so than in the Christian context. The technological revolution has helped. With a small budget a church can create striking educational projects. There is no longer an excuse for churches to confine themselves to cork bulletin board displays.

Our discussion will be limited in such a broad area as is now open to the church, so supplemental readings are suggested. We will look at basic tools and products used by professionals to create displays and exhibits and suggest a plan of action.

Tools and products

Construction materials. Museums and other exhibitors spend many thousands of dollars constructing creative display cases, large and small, temporary and permanent. A wall can be turned into an exhibit. . .or a room. . .or a building. . .or a neighborhood. There are lots of ways to construct an exhibit, and those suggested here have two criteria. They are fairly inexpensive. They are easy to use.

Foamcore and Gatorboard are two products we will refer to a great deal in the next few pages. They are both a plastic foam filled board with a hard outer layer on which photos, drawings, or type can be mounted.

For most church uses Foamcore is preferable for a number of reasons. It is easier to obtain, usually through professional photographers, frame shops and their suppliers. It is less costly (We are told a 32"x40" sheet now costs about \$5.). It may be cut with an X-acto Brand Knife, while Gatorboard requires a scrolling or jig saw. Gatorboard is tougher and sturdier, and is preferred by some photofinishing shops for mounting photos. The Archives uses it, for example, as mounting for our General Assembly exhibit, which must be hauled around the country.

Both products have an attractive white plastic surface. They are extremely light-weight and withstand abuse. They glue easily and attach quickly with velcro fasteners.

Plywood is no surprise on a list of construction materials,

but realize that good, interior-grade (AD) plywood is becoming more expensive. Good quality wood of any type is harder to find. For most purposes use exterior-grade (CD) 1/8-inch, paint the surface with latex-base paint and back it with furring strips or other cheap lumber support. The 1/4-inch or 1/2-inch board will be necessary if the plywood is supporting much weight. A 3/8-inch thickness is best for shelves.

Particle board is also becoming more expensive, but it is a suitable substitute for plywood as a covering. It does not make an effective support frame. Masonite coverings or wood-grain paneling is an inexpensive coverup.

Pine 1x10s are recommended for shadow boxes and 1x4s for framing supports.

Free-standing display panels, fastened with piano hinges are versatile ways to display and they also are cheap and easy to make from inexpensive hollow-core interior doors, sold in any lumber yard or building supply store. The doors are light-weight and are attractive when painted with latex-base paint. They can be turned in various ways so one set of panels can fit into oddly-shaped spaces and be reused for several exhibits. By carefully cutting through one side of the door's face and enclosing the empty space between the faces, a shadow box can be designed. The only drawback to this kind of exhibit is that it can be easily knocked over by children if there isn't some base support or a way to attach it to a solid object.

Plastic foam. Building supply centers sell an array of types. It is soft and easy to work. It glues nicely and can be cut into shapes. It will not take much abuse however, so don't use it in areas where there will be considerable wear.

Plastic glass. This is manufactured under several brand names, the most common, Plexiglas. For most exhibits and displays use plastic instead of glass. If it breaks it will not cut. It is harder to break. It is easy to cut (though it scratches easily as well). It looks like glass.

Special tools and supplies. Some wonderful helps have come along in recent years to make good exhibits possible for novices. Aside from carpenter's tools needed to deal with conventional construction materials, you will need:

A hot glue gun. These guns are sold by many companies and brand names. Some now sell for \$5 or less. These are hand-held plastic heating elements that melt solid, wax-like glue pellets. With a little practice you can extrude an even bead of glue strong enough to hold plastics, foam core panels and light wood. A drop will secure metal pieces in position without damaging them.

Cutting tools. Light-weight metal handles which hold tiny disposable blades are sold in hobby stores under the brand name of X-acto. These are ideal for cutting across paper, cardboard, and photographs. Foamcore and plastics need a stronger cutting edge, a carpenter's knife with a retracting blade. The brand recommended to us is the Stanley Razor Knife and blades. Stanley knives are strong, safe in design, and durable. A metal straight edge, such as a yard stick, meter stick, or pica rule, is needed to guide the blade in a straight line.

Interlocking-fiber fasteners. These go by the brand name Velcro and are available in strips, squares and dots. Velcro works for attaching large pieces to displays. An adhesive backing on the fastener sticks to the pieces which will be joined. Push together the two sides of the fastener, the fibers stick together, and voila! A board, mounted photo or whatever is stuck in place. If it's a little crooked, pull gently to separate the interlocking fibers and adjust. If it doesn't seem secure, attach another strip. The adhesive is usually easy to remove, but do not use it on valuable objects. Another fastener which may be used is a strip of foam with covered adhesive on both sides. Once these strips have been in place a short time they give a secure bond--too secure for easy removal later. There is more chance of damage with foam tape.

Spray adhesive. Be careful to direct the spray to the right spot, or there may be a mess. It is good for mounting non-archival photos, labels, maps and similar materials. Non-resin-coated photos and most papers are mounted easily with wheat wallpaper paste. Wheat paste comes dry, in a sack. Add water a little at a time to reach a smooth, working consistency. Practice to get the proper technique and mixture. Apply to the paper and mount it, being careful to work out air bubbles and ridges without pulling apart the paper fibers. Blot the excess and let it dry.

Spray plastics. Polyurethane spray sealers give a nice sheen and protection to some projects. Test them on a sample, though, before using, and don't use on archival materials. Spray with light, even coats. Let the board dry thoroughly between coats. Follow the package directions for avoiding runs.

Lettering for headlines and labels. A typographer or print-shop produces the very nicest type, but even museums are avoiding the cost of professional typesetting. For most small labels, a word-processor or even a typewriter is sufficient. For larger or more critical lettering, use a rub-off sheet of letters. A good brand to get is "Chartpak." Such lettering sheets come in an array of styles, so the exhibitor can be very creative. The letters may not be as large as you want. No problem. . . Photocopy them on an enlarging copy machine. Copy again and again to get the desired size. Cut and wheat paste the copy on foam core board.

Planning the display

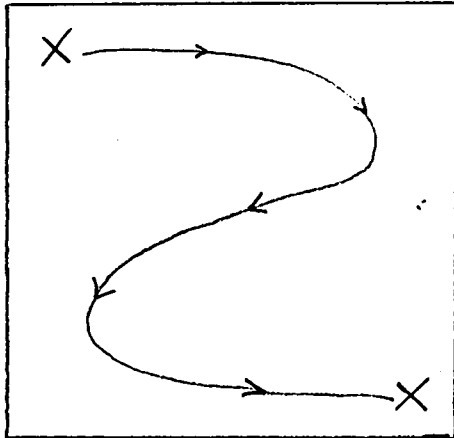
It doesn't take a lot of material to make an attractive, fun and informative display. In fact, anyone who has been to an average small town museum knows that many artifacts, piled into a case or attached to a board cause a loss of interest in a hurry.

There's more to do in a good exhibit than building it, so someone with a creative eye should be assigned solely to plan the exhibit. Done correctly it will take some time.

Follow these steps:

1. **The Committee should choose a theme for the exhibit.** If the church is celebrating its 50th anniversary as a particular church, what might be highlighted in an exhibit? The buildings? The founding members? The ministries? The ministers? The different groups that have been active? What might people like to know more about?
2. **Survey what sorts of things might be used.** This will be easier if the church has done the survey described in Preservation section. Find out if there is anything good to use.
3. **Make a copy plan.** Start by learning about the subject to be covered or getting help from someone who knows it. Outline or write down concepts to be covered. Write a brief page about each concept. Have someone read it who isn't familiar with the subject. Do they learn something? Do they find it interesting? Should there be more information about any area? Write down each point on a note card, and list artifacts, photos, drawings, books, and letters which might illustrate it. Arrange these note cards to tell the story in logical sequence.
4. **Decide how best to show off the materials.** The more space, the more the options. If the exhibit consists entirely of photos and letters, a set of panels, hinged together with piano hinges will probably work fine. If there are artifacts or reproductions of little value, add painted plywood cubes of differing heights as display centers. Glue artifacts to the surface and put labels along side. A sealed shadow box, the cubes with a recessed top covered by plastic glass, or a plastic glass display case may be right for items of more value. Furniture may require a roped off area where the items can be arranged to show how they would originally have been used. The barrier might be a display of paper items and labels to tell the story of the furniture.

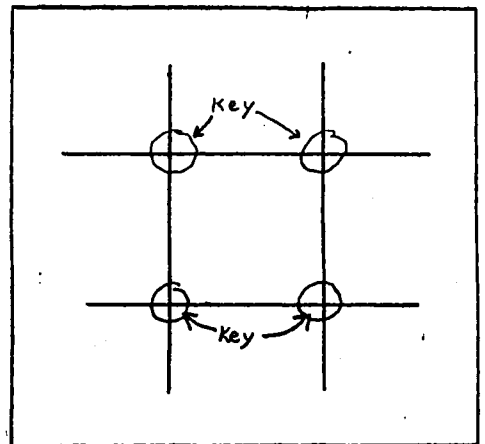
5. Design the display. Let's say you will use a set of plywood or hollow-core door panels for the display. The panels will be covered with cloth or rolled with latex



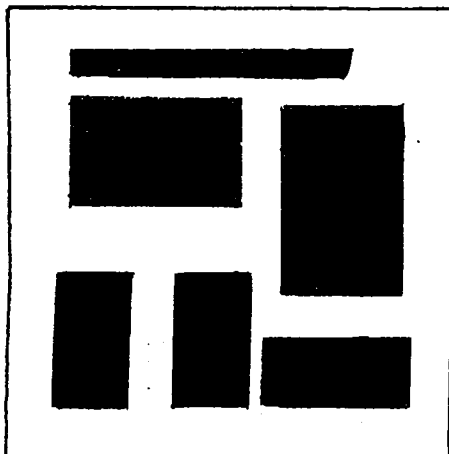
paint to make a white or pastel color scheme. When finished they will be set up accordion fashion, a series of v-shaped insets. This is a little like pages of a newspaper as they are read. As each page is turned a new page design emerges. A good-looking newspaper doesn't just happen. The designer knows the eye starts at the top left-hand corner of the page and moves back and forth across the page in a backward "S" motion, as illustrated at left. A graphic

designer will place an important story or key photo toward the upper left of the page. That is a good spot

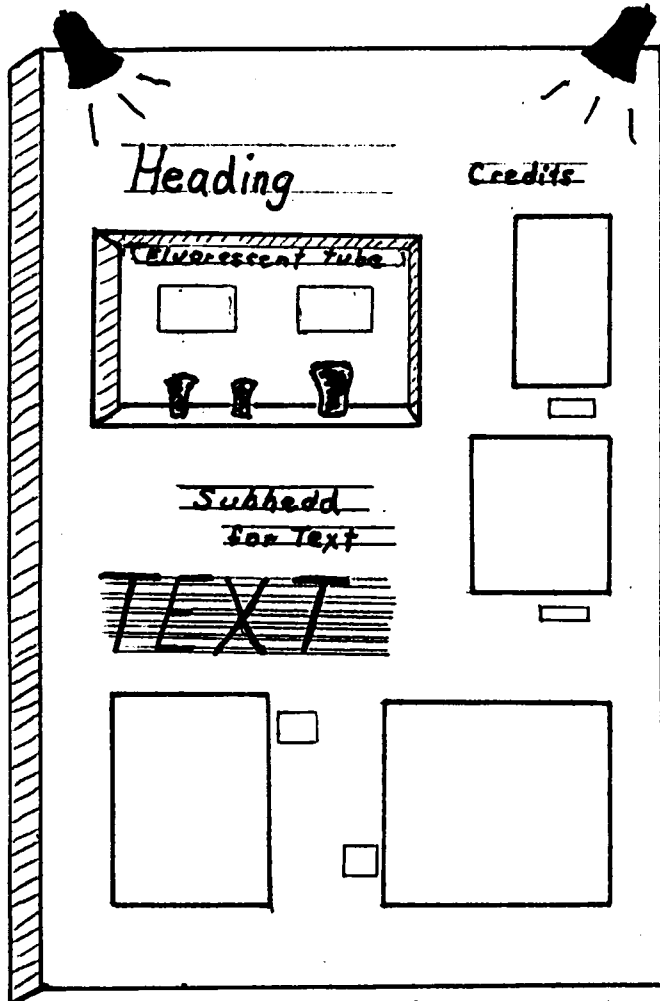
that shouldn't be missed. From there, follow the eye-flow to arrange other elements on the panel. The designer also knows that the eye hates to see things perfectly centered. Divide the space into thirds so that it resembles a tic-tac-toe board. Those who see the exhibit won't know why, but they will see and enjoy things more which are placed off-center, at the four points where the lines meet.



Some other basic rules of graphic design may also come into play in the exhibit. The space around each part of the display is as important as the parts covered by



information. Avoid cluttering a single panel with too much, fit together too tightly. The space must not be "trapped." If a layout looks like Fort Dodge--empty area surrounded by a wall of things, it will suffer. Sameness in size and shape is another deadly disease. A title should be more dramatic than a label. An important photo should stand out in size. The key is to be selective. Tell a piece of story on each panel. Keep words to a minimum. Pick the best things to show.



An exhibit doesn't have to be restricted to the panels. If a hollow door is used, think about a cut-out section. Highlight an artifact or photograph in this shadowbox frame. A table or display cubes nearby can add variety. Cut left-over Foamcore into triangles and glue to labels as a stand-up base. An unused closet can also be a good display area. Enclose the bottom with paneling, allowing access to space on the floor. Build a lighted display case which extends up from a shelf two or three feet off the floor. A locked plastic glass front door protects displayed materials. Frosted glass or plastic behind or above this kind of display allows soft back or top lighting. Thick plywood is strong enough for a simple box "stage". . .or remove shelves from a solid old bookcase. Extend top and bottom out from the base. The top overhang is for lights. The bottom is the display stage.

When designing a display or exhibit, remember:

- The needs of children. They must see it too, so be sure it is visible from a child's perspective. If a fabric or artifact isn't valuable, especially if it has texture to touch, display it to invite a child to feel. Assure parents by sign that this is permitted. Things that might be damaged by children should be separated from them. Don't tempt and expect parents to act as policemen.
- The needs of all who view the display. Signs should be clear and concise. Questions should be answered. Objects shown should be explained. Lettering should be readable for a person with less-than-perfect eyesight. Light should be adequate, but not harsh.
- The needs of the artifacts. When possible, display copies of photos and documents, not originals. Note the discussion in the Preservation section about protection of materials from sunlight, heat from incandescent bulbs and UV rays in fluorescent light.

Suggestions for displays

Museum people have come up with other creative ideas for exhibits and displays. Here are a few:

- "Distressing" documents. Some things are too fragile or valuable to take the chance on exhibiting, but wouldn't it be nice to avoid the photocopy look? If the church office has some old copy paper which has yellowed but will still go through a copy machine, copy on this. The same effect can be gained by copying a document and placing the copy in a hot window for a week. If you need a copy that looks really old, make it on good 100-percent rag paper. Then soak it in a pot of strong coffee for a few minutes or until the correct stain is achieved. Blot the excess and dry. Crumple, fray, or singe the edges with a match. Fold. Rub on dirt and soot. Soon it will look as bad as you wish. Be careful not to label it as original, however.
- Encapsulate. Encapsulation, which is covered in the Preservation section, allows even fragile documents to be displayed in low light conditions for an exhibit which doesn't last too long.
- Move it. The hollow-core door exhibit allows another advantage--It is light enough to be mobile. A simple exhibit can travel through a whole Presbytery with a minimal amount of work.
- Build anticipation. A church exhibit usually has a short interest span. There are a limited number of people to see it. Increase their enjoyment by installing it a little at a time. The story will grow over weeks, rather than hit all at once. If it is striking enough, people will anticipate the next installment. A variation is to start well ahead of the dates of the exhibit to display "teaser" photos or documents on an otherwise empty board, with enough explanation to heighten curiosity.
- Recreate with models. Exhibit what no longer exists with research and some imagination. Learn what you can about the first building or the layout of the community when a church was founded. Then recruit the teens to help build a scale model layout. Model train stores sell grass, trees, building kits. Model enthusiasts are helpful sorts in advising on such matters. Use a strong plywood base. Make hills and natural features from clay or wire mesh covered with plaster. Cut the plaster with a hobby knife to resemble rock formations and paint. Balsa or bass wood can be cut to recreate specific buildings.

Concluding a celebration

For a major celebration in the life of the church there should be a definite start and a definite finish. Some event should begin and another signal the end. That doesn't mean that all the effects of the celebration should end. Something concrete and positive should have been instituted into church life which will continue after the special time is over.

Do not forget that someday this event should be looked back on itself as a significant piece of history. Save all planning papers and reports, programs and other tangible documentation of what happened. Send a copy of major documents, along with a report on what the church did to the PCA Archives. Keep another copy at the church for reference.

Make a final report as well to the congregation, reviewing what the event was supposed to accomplish and actually did. This will allow for important evaluation by many people. It will show what worked, what didn't, and what might be done in the future.

Summary

These ideas are starting points for celebration, but they are no good if all they lead to is committees, busy church members and some fun happenings. As your committee works through its goals and objectives--and then makes of them a program--it should keep in mind the example of the Old Testament church. This was a church which celebrated. Some of this was ordained by God. Some of it was the idea of the king or priests. But in every proper celebration the event was only a means to worship, revitalization, and renewal.

Members of your church should learn something about how God in Christ has dealt with them as a result of celebration. They should be humbled, not exalted; made to see their dependence, not their independence. They should be challenged to see the big picture of their place along side past, present, and future believers in evangelism, purity, ministry, and praise.

Keys to proper celebration might be the precepts found in Psalm 34. It is a call to the community of God to exalt God's name because of his miraculous deliverance. It is an invitation to "taste and see that the Lord is good" for "blessed is the man who takes refuge in him." It is a covenantal challenge to children to learn and know the reality of the redeemer.

We should always be a celebrating people. We alone have much to celebrate.