

to establish local churches wherever people responded to the gospel and were converted. This is the divine order for today.

You have become acquainted with this part of the great body of Christ in your association with a local community of believers affiliated with the Assemblies of God. Because of your relationship to Christ, you are in fellowship with us.

Your next important step, then, is to consider membership with us as a part of your development as a born-again believer in accord with the teachings of the New Testament.

Two important facts will come into focus as we share the purpose of the church as it developed under the Spirit-guided leadership of the apostles. One is that you need the ministry of the church, which can fully come to you only as you become identified with it through church membership. The second fact is that the church, to carry out its divine commission, needs you.

YOU NEED THE CHURCH

The local church is a vital element in the kingdom of God. The Bible gives us the reason for being of a local church such as our own. Let us look at some of the Biblical reasons for establishing and maintaining local churches.

1. *The local church, through the preaching of the gospel, is a place for salvation of the unbeliever and for nurturing the new believer.*

In writing to the church at Corinth, Paul said, "I have begotten you through the gospel" (1 Corinthians 4:15). Here is the place where the gospel can be proclaimed and the sinner can be converted.

Then Paul wrote of the second purpose of the local church, that of "feeding" the believers. "And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual [mature believers], but . . . as unto babes in Christ. I have fed you with milk, and not with meat" (1 Corinthians 3:1, 2; see also Peter's comments in 1 Peter 2:2).

Nobody but the mentally disturbed would abandon a baby at birth. He needs shelter, nourishment, love, and care.

In a spiritual sense, this is what the local church provides for new converts.

2. *The church provides teaching and stability, which is a strong defense against error.*

Paul knew the danger of believers falling into error. His writings and example in the New Testament underscore this fact. To Timothy he wrote, "The things that thou hast heard of me . . . the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others" (2 Timothy 2:2). And he