

January doesn't just mark the Season of Epiphany, but the Season of Annual Meetings as well.

In many congregations, January doesn't just mark the Season of Epiphany, but the Season of Annual Meetings as well. Soon, congregations around the country will gather to elect officers, pass budgets, report on last year's activities and look ahead to the year to come. In the weeks prior, copiers will be running like its Holy Week, reports will be submitted and collated, nominations secured, and budgets finalized.

However, for all the work that goes into the Annual Meeting, they can oftentimes be, well, boring—and sparsely attended.

Three years ago, my congregation barely had enough people attend our Annual Meeting to meet quorum (having enough members present to meet and vote). So, we decided to change it up, and we transformed our Annual Meeting into the “One Church Celebration.”

Combine Meeting and Worship

First, we combined our three Sunday services into one. Then we integrated elements of the Annual Meeting into the worship itself, mixing the music of our band, the organ, and musical ensembles. This brought everyone together, highlighted our music ministries, and celebrated our mission and ministry. The President of the Congregation offered a welcome toward the beginning of the service as part of the Call to Worship. During the sermon time, the pastors shared brief reflections on the year. We conducted the business of the annual meeting after Communion and ended with a final song and dismissal.

Altogether, it was a beautiful way to come together and blend worship, ministry, and the business operations of the church. And the attendance for our Annual Meeting soared!

Break Bread Together

In addition to Communion, our Annual Meetings have always involved food. It is great opportunity for fellowship and relationship building. In our third iteration of the One Church Celebration this year, our youth group will host a pancake breakfast fundraiser for their annual mission trip to the Appalachia Service Project. You might decide to host some other breakfast or brunch event—perhaps even [a feast in honor of your patron saint](#), if you have one.

Mindful of Mission

An Annual Meeting is a great time to reconnect with the congregation's mission and vision. How did we fulfill our mission and vision from last year? What are our hopes and dreams for next year? Oftentimes we can get so bogged down in spreadsheets, voting ballots, and reports (all of which are important!) that we miss the bigger picture of how God has been at work in us, in our church, and where God is leading us in the coming year.

Thank and Recruit Volunteers

A Church Celebration can also be a great time to thank and recruit the volunteers who make congregational life happen. There are so many ways to do this. We display a Powerpoint on our screens with pictures from various activities and ministries. You could ask people who work in a particular area to stand and be recognized. This year we created "Ask Me About" nametags, so people from various teams and groups can be identified and talk about what they do.

Celebrate!

Finally, for all the challenges we may have faced, for all of the loses we may have endured, an Annual Meeting is a moment to pause and celebrate our past and present and look ahead with hope to the future. As Saint Paul encourages us in 1 Thessalonians 5, *"Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you."*

May your Annual Meeting this year be something to celebrate!

Keith Anderson is the Associate for Digital Content for Lifelong Learning at Virginia Theological Seminary and pastor at Upper Dublin Lutheran Church, Ambler, PA.