

# Assembly Fellowship: Entry, Exit and Exercise

## The Church - Entry into what?

The Bible speaks of **the Church** (Eph. 1.22-23: *'the Church which is His Body'*) and it speaks of **the churches** (1 Cor. 11. 16 - also called the Church of God). Both terms will need explained. First, what does the word church mean?

**The word church speaks of called-out people and not a place or prominent building.** The word church (ekklesia) is composed of two words- ek (out of) and klesia (calling). Therefore, the basic meaning of the word "church" is a called-out company of people. It was originally used of a crowd of people drawn together for a secular purpose (Acts 19.32: *Some therefore cried one thing, and some another: for the assembly was confused*) or of a Jewish congregation (Acts 7.38: *This is he, that was in the church in the wilderness with the angel which spake to him in the mount Sina*) but it came to mean in our New Testament a company of called out believers in the Lord Jesus. Almost all of the 111 references have this meaning.

**The word Church is never once used to describe a building**, which is how it is normally used today. Lest any reader confuses the word 'Church' (ekklesia) with a building and not a called-out assembly of believers, then the word 'assembly' will generally be used instead of the word church. The bible speaks of the church 'hearing' or 'speaking' or 'being washed' – all terms appropriate when used of a people but not of a building.

**The Church is something new, not Israel but composed of Jews and Gentiles.** He Lord Jesus spoke in the future tense of the church, **'I will build my church'** (Matt. 16. 18) when Israel has been around for over 3000 years. Paul called it something 'new' composed of two people Jew and Gentile incorporated into one new organism (Eph. 2. 15-16: *Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace;*).

**The Church is also not an organisation, but Paul calls it an organism, a body** (1 Cor.12. 12-13). It is in actual fact a mystical thought – it composes all believers that have trusted in the Lord Jesus Christ as their Saviour and are resting upon Him (the Rock – Matt. 16. 18) from the birthday of the Church (day of Pentecost in Acts 2) until the completion of the Church when the Lord Jesus comes back for His own people (often called the Rapture, 1Thess. 4. 13-18); read Eph.5:27, 1Cor. 12. 12; Heb. 12. 22. The Church is called the *'church of the firstborn'* (Heb. 12:22) as it is composed of all those who are saved and been made Sons of God; firstborn is a title of rank, indicating that we have a place of privilege in God's family. The Church is called the Church which is His Body (Eph. 1. 23) which reminds us that we Christians are the body of Christ connected to our Head in heaven - Christ.

## **How do I enter into the church?**

You are in the church if you are saved. It happened automatically upon salvation. No other criteria are required for admission. Some parallels in comparison and contrast of the character of the Church of God (1Cor.1:2) and the Church which is His body (Eph.1:22-23).

## **What are the Churches?**

**The churches** are also not buildings or organisations but **groups of believers in a given locality called out to serve and honour the Lord Jesus alone** owning no other allegiance to any human organisation or denomination (Matt. 18. 20). It is also not a mystical thought, but a recognisable company complete in itself although limited to a particular place and time. The local assembly can be addressed (*tell it unto the church* – Matt. 18.17) and it can speak with one voice (*if he neglect to hear the church* – Matt.18.17).

**So, if God established the Church in Christ at Pentecost who establishes churches?** God establishes Churches. Christ bought each local church with his own blood (Acts 20:28: *Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.*). The Gospel was preached, people believed the message, they were baptised and subsequently God established an assembly (Acts 2. 41-42; 14:21-23). Those saved and baptised thereafter were **added** to this assembly (Acts 2:41). Men planted the seed of the word of God, others watered, but God gave the increase (1Cor. 3. 6). The foundation that was laid was the Lord Jesus Christ (1Cor. 3. 11) and nothing else. The basis of their gathering was Christ. It was God who established each lampstand (assembly) in Revelation 2-3 on their own base. So, although many labour, it is God who saves, reveals the truth of baptism and establishes local churches. No one has the gift of "church planting".

## **How would I know a local church (assembly) if I saw one?**

**Would I know it by its building? No, not really!** In homes (Rom.16:5: Rome Likewise greet the church that is in their house.); in a school (Acts 19:9: school of one Tryannus in Ephesus); in an upper room (Acts 1:13 Jerusalem); in the open space in front of the temple (Acts 2.46).

## **Would I know a local church by its Name? Well yes but you might get a surprise.**

The 'Disciples' of Christ were also known as "Christians" (Acts 11:26), "Saints" (1Cor.14:33) and "believers" (Acts 2:44: And all that believed were together). No other name was taken. The common occurrence today of taking a name after a great person like Lutheran", "Wesleyan Methodist" or a region like 'Church of Ireland' or a bible doctrine such as 'Episcopalian', 'Presbyterian', or 'Baptist' is foreign to scripture as we have no authority to describe ourselves in any other term than that which is in scripture. All of these names are sectarian by nature. No church was ever called "the Brethren". We should not therefore ever use this name. The early believers were "gathered together "into His Name" (Matt.18. 20), that is the Name of the Lord Jesus, and came out "Unto

Him” (Heb.13. 13). Can we gather to any other Name? How were local churches referred to? ‘Churches of God’ is the most common expression(1 Cor. 11. 16; 1Thess 2. 14; 2Thess. 1. 4; Acts 20. 28; 1 Cor.1. 2; 10:32; 11. 22; 1Tim. 3. 5, 15). It reminds us that the assembly of believers is owned by God. We also have churches of the gentiles (Rom.16:4) reminding us that it was not just the Jewish people that were gathered to His Name. Churches of the saints (1 Cor.14:33: For God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints.) is another title for the church as it is composed of people who have been set apart for God, and Churches of Christ is a further title (Rom.16. 16) indicating that the Church exists for the glory of Christ.

### Would I know them by their headquarters?

There was not any headquarters and they warned about creating any (Heb 13. 13-14- *Let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach. For here (i.e. on earth) have we no continuing city (centre of administration), but we seek one to come.*) They were local companies with no overarching human authority (Acts 8:1: *the church which was at Jerusalem*; 13:1 *Now there were in the church that was at Antioch*; 20:17: *And from Miletus he sent to Ephesus, and called the elders of the church.*; 1Cor.1:2: *Unto the church of God which is at Corinth*; Col.4:16 *And when this epistle is read among you, cause that it be read also in the church of the Laodiceans*). There is no hint in scripture of any federation of churches at all; neither meeting on the grounds of common doctrine worldwide or on the convenience of geographical boundaries in a more limited way. There is no scripture at all for any alliance of churches.

### Would I know them if I knew how they were financed? Who is supporting them?

Local assemblies were very simple. Denominations and secular organisations spend a lot of their time discussing budgets and cash flow issues. What was the funding source for these disparate groups of believers gathered to the name of the Lord Jesus Christ across the world? How did they resolve these matters? Believers in each assembly simply laid aside money every first day of the week (1 Cor.16.1-2: *Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given order to the churches of Galatia, even so do ye. Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come.*) for specific needs. Also, in the very early days of the church they shared everything; this was in a time of crisis (Acts 2.44). Believers were taught that it was their duty to give money to servants (1 Cor. 9.12-16) and other saints in other assemblies (Rom. 15. 26-28: *For it hath pleased them of Macedonia and Achaia to make a certain contribution for the poor saints which are at Jerusalem*; 2 Cor. 8. 1-9. 15). No church relied on a bigger organisation supporting them or even a bigger church. There is no scripture for a common fund amongst churches. The scriptures teach the radical thought that local churches should be **self-supporting**. They had no central fund. They were **self-governing**. They had no central oversight. They were also **self-propagating**. They had no central commissioning body i.e. they took full responsibility for the propagation of the gospel in their own area and beyond. They also looked after the practical needs of the members particularly if family support broke down (Acts 6. 1-15; 1Timothy 5)

You would know them by their simplicity, Christian character, holy walk, love for Christ, adherence to His Word in every detail, worship and prayer, gospel preaching. Love for their believers, fellowship, love for sinners. See Exercise.

<p><b>The Local Assembly—the churches</b>  <b>The Church of God</b>                      (1Cor.7:17; 11:16)</p>	<p><b>The Church</b>  <b>The Church which is His Body</b>                      (Col.1:18)</p>	<p><b>The Church is not Israel.</b></p>
<p><b>Comparison</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Called out unto Him (Heb.13:13)</li> <li>• Lord’s Teaching (Matt . 18:20)</li> <li>• Body ( 1Cor. 12:27)</li> <li>• Chaste Virgin (2Cor. 11:2)</li> <li>• Building (1Cor. 3:9)</li> <li>• Purchased with Blood (Acts 20:28)</li> <li>• Foundation—Christ (1Cor.3:11)</li> <li>• No central oversight – Christ is head (Col.2:19; Eph.4:15-16; Heb.13:17)</li> </ul>	<p><b>Comparison</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Called out from the world (Gal.1:4)</li> <li>• Lord’s Teaching (Matt. 16:18)</li> <li>• Body (Eph. 1:22-23)</li> <li>• Bride (Eph.5:25-27,32; Rev. 21:9)</li> <li>• Building (Matt.16.18)</li> <li>• Purchased with Blood (Eph.5:23,25)</li> <li>• Foundation— Christ (Matt.16:18 )</li> <li>• No central oversight – Christ is Head (Eph.5:23)</li> </ul>	<p><b>(i) Church a future thought</b>                      The Lord Jesus said,                      “I will build my church”                      indicating that the church is something that was still future when He was speaking to Israel (Matt 16. 18)</p>
<p>[The Assembly is also likened to a House (1Tim.3.15), Temple (1Cor.3.16), Letter (2Cor.3:2), Field (1Cor.3:9), Flock (1Pet.5:2), Lampstand (Rev.1:20) and Pillar (1Tim.3:15)]</p>		<p><b>(ii) Church a new thought</b>                      Paul called the Church, “One new man”. The Church is composed of Jews and Gentiles on equal grounds into one new organism (Ephesians 2. 15-16)</p>
<p><b>Contrast</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• An assembly of professing believers gathered in a locality unto the name of the Lord Jesus (Acts 13:1; Mt. 18.20)</li> <li>• Enter on Reception (Acts 18.27; 15:4)</li> <li>• Excommunication possible (1Cor.5:4-5)</li> <li>• Gender distinction commanded (1Cor.14:34-35; 1Tim.2:9-15)</li> <li>• Baptised in water by man (Acts 2:41; 8:38)</li> <li>• Water Baptism required for inclusion (Acts 2:41)</li> <li>• Possible for unsaved to be part of it through deceiving the brethren (Acts20:29)</li> <li>• Led by Overseers (Acts 20:17,28)</li> </ul>	<p><b>Contrast</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All believers throughout church period (Eph.5:27; 1Cor.12:12; Heb.12:22)</li> <li>• Enter on Salvation (Eph.1:19-23; Col.1:18-23)</li> <li>• No excommunication possible (Matt.16:18)</li> <li>• No gender distinction (Gal.3:28)</li> <li>• Baptised by the Lord Jesus in the Holy Spirit (John 1:33; 1Cor.12:13)</li> <li>• Water Baptism not required for inclusion (Eph.2:8)</li> <li>• Impossible for unsaved to be part of it (Eph.5:26-27)</li> <li>• No Overseers</li> </ul>	

## **Entry into the local assembly - How were new members added to the local churches?**

**It was simple but they were 'received' into assembly fellowship, it was not automatic upon salvation or on baptism.** There were those who were 'within' and those who were 'without' (1 Cor. 5. 12-13). Believers were 'added' to the local church (Acts 2. 41, 47). In any gathering of the local assembly unsaved would be present and even believers who were still learning truth – they are called the 'unlearned' (1 Cor. 14. 24) - but there were also those who were saved, baptised and in assembly fellowship and these were all known to the church.

**Those who were received into assembly fellowship were received by the whole church.** The whole assembly receives (Acts 15. 4 - *And when they were come to Jerusalem, they were received of the church*).

**Those who were received into assembly fellowship were received to all of the assembly functions** and privileges (Acts 2.41 - 42). Paul was 'coming in and going out' (Acts 9. 28) i.e. involved in everything when he was received. No such thing as partial or casual fellowship or receiving just to one of the functions say the breaking of Bread. Membership is not like being a member of say a bowling club it is likened to being a member in a body in 1 Cor. 12. 14-27. It is not just about having a name on the roll you are a pivotal member of the body and the body cannot really function without you.

Members were added upon confession of faith in the Lord Jesus, obedience in the waters of baptism and a willingness to be added to the assembly in testimony for Christ by continuing steadfastly in the apostle's doctrine, fellowship, breaking of bread and prayers (Acts 2. 41-42). In these days of such confusion about salvation, baptism, doctrine of Christ and the assembly gatherings (breaking of bread, prayers etc) it would be wise, where there is any doubt, to ensure that all these matters are in order before we receive anyone into assembly fellowship. Paul did warn about this who would worm their way in by the side door (Jude 4: *For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men.*; Acts 20.29: *For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock.*). John said that we should 'try the spirits' whether they were of God (1 John 4. 1). For some believers establishing these matters in a brief interview will be straight forward, for others there may well be a period of time required to be fully sure. Wisdom and sensitivity is required by the elders in handling these matters on behalf of the assembly and discernment to handle different types of individuals. Establishing these matters should be characterised by love and grace and with a deep recognition of the holiness of God and His House. There was no elaborate initiation ceremony, however. It was very simple, but still highly profound as preparation for reception to His House is of God and not man.

**Were any believers ever denied full fellowship? Yes,**

- **Acts 9.26; the issue was they doubted if Paul was a true believer**

*And when Saul was come to Jerusalem, he assayed to join himself to the disciples: but they were all afraid of him, and believed not that he was a disciple. Act 9:27 But Barnabas took him, and brought him to the apostles, and declared unto them how he had seen the Lord in the way, and that he had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus. Act 9:28 And he was with them coming in and going out at Jerusalem.*

- **Acts 18.25-19.5; the issue was whether these believers could prove they were baptised, in the name of the Lord Jesus, as believers. It materialised that they had been baptised in John's name, to become believers. They were, therefore, baptised again.**

*Acts 19.1 And it came to pass, that, while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul having passed through the upper coasts came to Ephesus: and finding certain disciples, Act 19:2 He said unto them, Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed? And they said unto him, We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost. Act 19:3 And he said unto them, Unto what then were ye baptized? And they said, Unto John's baptism. Act 19:4 Then said Paul, John verily baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people, that they should believe on him which should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus. Act 19:5 When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.*

- **1 Cor.14.23-24; the issue was whether they were saved (some of them were unbelievers), or whether they were baptised and continuing steadfastly in the apostle's doctrine (the unlearned).**

*1 cor 14.23 If therefore the whole church be come together into one place, and all speak with tongues, and there come in those that are unlearned, or unbelievers, will they not say that ye are mad? 1Co 14:24 But if all prophesy, and there come in one that believeth not, or one unlearned, he is convinced of all, he is judged of all:*

*1Co 14:25 And thus are the secrets of his heart made manifest; and so falling down on his face he will worship God, and report that God is in you of a truth.*

**What happened when visitors arrived and they were unknown?**

They brought a letter of commendation from the assembly that was sending them (Rom.16.1 (Phobe); Acts 18.27

(Apollos- *And when he was disposed to pass into Achaia, the brethren wrote, exhorting the disciples to receive him: who, when he was come, helped them much which had believed through grace.*); Eph.6.21-22 (Tychicus)) or they accepted that no letter was required as he who was coming was very well known and respected amongst them (2 Cor .3. 1-2) or else they accepted that they would not be initially received until they had proved they were true or someone who the Church could have confidence in confirmed they were true (Acts 9. 26-29). Their confidence would be assured if there was evidence of personal faith in Christ (Acts 9. 27), obedience in the waters of baptism (Acts 9. 18) and willingness to be identified with Christ alone owning no other allegiance to any religious order (Acts 9. 20, 22, 27). Visitors were always welcome, however, to sit and observe the gatherings of the saints even if they could not be received to the full fellowship of the assembly (1 Cor. 14.23-25) they could still realise that "God was amongst

them of a truth". Both the "unsaved" and "unlearned" (saved but not in fellowship) were free to observe the gatherings and be amongst the people of God.

### **EXIT** What is the basis for putting someone out of the local assembly?

- **Immorality** (1Cor. 5. 3-5), *'For I verily, as absent in body, but present in spirit, have judged already, as though I were present, concerning him that hath so done this deed. In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when ye are gathered together, and my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ. To deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.'*
- **False doctrine** (Gal. 5. 12: *'I would they were even cut off which trouble you.'*)
- **Blasphemy** (1 Tim. 1. 20: *'Of whom is Hymenaeus and Alexander; whom I have delivered unto Satan, that they may learn not to blaspheme.'*);
- **Failure to heed assembly discipline** (Matt. 18. 17: *'And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican.'*)
- **Dishonesty** (Acts 5. 1-11) – In this case God acted directly. There were examples of this direct judgment by God in Corinth as well (1Cor. 11. 30)

Discipline was always done with a view to complete restoration to the fellowship of the assembly (Gal. 6.1; 1Cor. 5.5; 2Cor. 2.5-8).

**Who receives and who puts away?** The local Church (Acts 15. 4; Matt. 18. 18; 1Cor. 5.4)

**Are there any other degrees of discipline within the churches?** Yes

Where there is a personal problem between saints then it must be sorted out privately between the parties concerned (Matt. 18. 15-16; 5.23-24) and if that does not succeed it should be heard by a few elder brethren and then if necessary, by the whole church. Only after all of this would there be a requirement for excommunication (Matt.18. 15-20) and that only if one or more of the parties failed to heed the voice of the assembly.

When there is a problem of sin in a believer's life that comes to the attention of the assembly then those who were overtaken in the fault should be guided back to the Lord by spiritual brethren (Gal. 6. 1).

Some matters that become very public must be handled in a public manner and therefore some who continued in sin were warned publicly (e.g. Phil.4.2 – two sisters at loggerheads, *'I beseech Euodias..)* others publicly rebuked for their behaviour towards an elder (1Tim.5.20: *Against an elder receive not an accusation, but before two or three witnesses. Them that sin rebuke before all, that others also may fear*), others publicly rebuked for bad doctrine (Titus 3. 10: *'A man that is an heretick after the first and second admonition reject'*) and then again the second time if necessary.

Finally, if a believer was regarded to be a bad testimony (2 Thess. 3. 11-14: *And if any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed. 2Th 3:15 Yet count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother.*) or were divisive in their conduct (Rom. 16. 17-19: *Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them. For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple.*) then their company should not proactively be sought by the other believers until their behaviour improved. Relations would still be cordial and courteous (*'count him not as an enemy but as a brother beloved'*) but the believers will not go out of their way to befriend them.

Discipline in the home of a believer is important (1 Tim.3. 12). Discipline in the House of God is essential (1Tim. 3.15; 1 Pet. 4. 17). Correction, however, is always to be regretted when it is required. Most of these matters would be entirely unnecessary if we listened to Paul's teaching, *'Be ye kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you'* (Eph. 4. 32).

### **Exercise – What should we every member be exercised about doing in the local assembly?**

We will deal with many other functions in future meeting, but two functions stand out above all others - worship and prayer. This is our highest calling and all in fellowship can do this. The Lord said, *'My House shall be called the house of prayer'* (Matthew 21.13). The Tabernacle, the temple and now the local church are all associated with worship. Hezekiah could say in his day: *'My sons, be not now negligent: for the LORD hath chosen you to stand before him, to serve him, and that ye should minister unto him, and burn incense (2 Chron 29.11)*. God has no other place for this and no higher purpose. If we lived out lives in holiness for Him and came trembling to His House to worship with full hearts, then nothing would be able to prevent the blessing.

### **The local assembly was the place of God's presence**

The local assembly is the only place where believers could fulfil their divine function as a priest in the priesthood (1Pet 2.5, 9: *To whom coming, as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious, Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.*), enjoy the immediate presence of Christ (Matt. 18. 20) and worship God collectively (Heb. 13.14-15: *Let us go forth there-*

fore unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach. For here have we no continuing city, but we seek one to come. By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name.).

### **The local assembly worshipped all together**

The B.O.B. is a church gathering: "when ye come together in the church" (11. 18). This does not mean a building but this meeting does take place with all the believers. Moreover it takes place 'in one place' (11. 20). It is not necessarily the Gospel Hall, but it is One place. That is, there are not two or three B.O.B. meetings in the one assembly. The Bible knows nothing about house groups where the local church is carved up into small groups. Every member should be present at all gatherings and in particular the B.O.B. Acts 2. 41-42 would again confirm this to be a church gathering. We have no examples of scripture that disciples broke bread together on their travels, even when there were many of them. Even in Acts 27, Paul, Luke, Aristarchus and others who were with him never broke bread during the long voyage together. In fact, Paul said he had not eaten bread for 14 days (Acts 27.33). However, they did find brethren at Puteoli where they abode seven days. Similarly, in Acts 20 several disciples were sailing together for 5 days, but they waited till they got to Troas assembly before breaking bread (Acts 20. 1-7).

### **The local assembly worshipped out of full hearts.**

The worship, whether in prayer or song, was all "to God" (1Pet. 2:5; Heb 13. 15) and the very best (the bible calls it fruit) that their hearts could offer concerning the Lord Jesus (Heb.13:15). There would be nothing stagnant or stilted about their worship- they had seen the Lord. No longer was worship the concern of a unique priestly family, all worshipped out of privilege and obedience. They all heard the Lord say "This do" and "Remember Me". Every first day of the week they all gathered to Break Bread (Acts 2. 42; 1Cor. 11.18, 20; Acts 20.7: *Upon the first of the weeks, when the disciples came to together to break bread*". Interestingly it does not say "the disciples came..", but "when the disciples came ...". This clause indicates that it was their practice. The apostle assumes this in 1 Cor. 16. 1 because he talks about the offering on the first day of the week. He clearly assumed the disciples gathered together on the first day of the week specially). This is the day that creation commenced, the day that Christ rose from the dead, the day the church formed, the first day of the week. We do not know what time on the Lord's day they gathered? But it was the first opportunity the church had to get together they broke bread. On that occasion Christ alone was the sole object of the meeting and nothing else. They certainly worshipped then. The breaking of the bread and the poured out cup was an act of remembrance of Christ (1Cor. 11. 24-25). The act of eating and drinking was a declaration of His death (1 Cor. 11. 26). Their worship rose higher than thanksgiving for their blessing but became occupied with "Him" and "His glory". There is no scripture for any musical instrument to accompany this worship anywhere in the Acts of the Apostles or in the letters to the churches. There is no scripture for "worship leaders". None of these man-made innovations can manufacture worship although they were used in Judaism. No human talent was on display. The worship of the local church was purely spiritual (*Jn.4.24 God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.*), not relying on natural resources or thinking, organised entirely by the Holy Spirit to the Glory of God. The Lord Jesus was the One "to whom" (1Pet.2:4) they gathered and the 'chief hymnist' in the gathering (Heb. 2. 12: *I will declare Your name to My brethren; In the midst of the assembly I will sing praise to You* NKJV).

**It was only the local assembly who broke bread** – '*those that gladly received his word were baptised... and added... continuing steadfastly in the apostles doctrine and in the fellowship.. and the breaking of bread (Acts 2.42)*'. It was a church meeting. It was not a free for all. Interestingly Judas was not at the table when the Lord instituted this feast of Remembrance (Read (1) Matthew 26. 20-25; (2) John 13. 30; (3) Matthew 26. 26-29). The Lord said to Paul in 1 Cor. 11. 23 that He took bread in the same night " he was being betrayed" (Newberry margin). Judas was out at the chief priests when the Lord instituted the feast.

### **The early church prayed together**

The local assembly was the **place for collective prayer** where believers could unburden themselves in the presence of God and collectively pray for each other and the wider needs of their community and country and know the strengthening effect of praying together and for one another (Acts 4. 22-24, 31).

**Their prayer meetings were a regular feature of the assembly life** (Acts 2. 42). In one of their prayer meetings the very building they were in shook (Acts 4. 31: *And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness.*). Their praying was earnest and real. Males and females prayed. Males uncovered their head when they prayed, females covered their head conscious that angels were witnessing as they expressed the truth of headship 1Cor. 11. 2-16. Some women's prayer contribution is singled out for commendation (Acts 1.14). Only the men prayed audibly and those who did publicly pray exemplified practical holiness (1Tim. 2. 8: *I will therefore that men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting; 1Cor. 14. 34: Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience, as also saith the law.; 1Tim. 2. 11-12: Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence.*). However all still prayed in their prayer meetings (1 Cor. 11. 4-6.) but not all audibly. Their prayer was marked by thanksgiving (1Thess. 5. 18: *In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you*) and supplication (Acts 1. 14: *These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren.*). Prayer meetings in the early church did not take second place to the gathering to hear the word preached. In fact, prayer preceded the word preached (Acts 6. 4). In some cases, special prayer meetings commenced due to the matters that were burdening the

saints, with sometimes spectacular results (Acts 12. 5). The prayer meeting was the power house. Angels attended their prayer meeting.