

## The Complete Church

In our time far too many see the church only as a gathering of people doing their religious thing. The church is considered irrelevant, outmoded. But the church is more than a human institution. The church at one and the same time is both human and divine. Its members are ordinary human beings but the church is also the divine body of Christ (1 Cor. 12). Martin Luther wrote, "The church is a high, deep, hidden thing which one may neither perceive nor see, but must grasp only by faith, through baptism, sacrament and word."

No thoughtful person can deny that today's church is suffering. The Christian Reformed denomination is rent by inner strife. And much time and energy are spent on denominational issues. But all this conflict shows a genuine love for the Lord and concern for the church and its ministry in the world. But with all this controversy we tend to forget that the local congregation is the only concrete manifestation of the church on earth. Our Lord said, "Upon this rock I will build my church" and the foundation to which He referred was Peter's glorious testimony: "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matt. 16:16). This passage shows that the church is not just a human organization but a body of believers who confess Christ as Lord and Savior and pledge themselves to Him.

Through the preaching of the gospel the church is established. On the day of Pentecost three thousand new converts "were added to their number that day" (Acts 2:41). These new believers and their children came together for fellowship, instruction in the Word of God, the celebration of the Lord's Supper, and worship. And in each local church, pastors, elders and deacons were elected or appointed and ordained. And each local church reached out into the community with the gospel. The local church in Antioch sent Barnabas and Paul to do mission work. The apostle did not write his letters to a denominational head office. When he wrote to the Church at Corinth, he was addressing a local congregation. He addressed churches in Galatia and a church in Ephesus. Through the apostle John our Lord sent His letters to the seven churches in Asia Minor (Rev. 2, 8). All these churches differed in their needs and their problems. Some were spiritually strong, others weak. Some faced doctrinal conflict, others struggled with interpersonal relationships and moral questions. But the outstanding feature was that through Christ they were related to each other. These churches did not exist in isolation. They were conscious of their common bond of faith with other churches. Yet each congregation was a manifestation of the body of Christ. And even today the church ministers to the world through local congregations. May we do likewise.

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