

October 3, 2021

## 5. The Church's Activities — **Acts 2:37-47 NRSV**

Our new unit of studies for October is “Church Means Assembly.” Session 5 looks at the early believers gathering to teach, fellowship, break bread, and pray. While today’s church activities tend to follow a similar pattern, they had to be redefined abruptly more than a year ago because of this long, lethal pandemic.

I asked a pastor of congregational life: How did your job change with COVID-19? What’s hardest about keeping the church together while apart? What did we learn during the shutdown? Here are a few of her observations, roughly organized according to the activities listed in Acts 2:42:

**Teaching:** “Suddenly helping people wear masks and teaching them to use Zoom. Written communication became more challenging because it depended on people reading, which doesn’t always happen. Positive changes: newsletter-type emails, online services. I doubt we would’ve arrived at those if we hadn’t really needed them.”

**Fellowship:** “Fear of being with people. Wearing masks, not seeing people’s facial expressions. No hospital visits, no touching people, especially hurting people. Difficult to know who’s still part of the church. Folks living in other places connected in online services. Zoom allowed us to be face-to-face, including missionaries. The hardest thing was not being able to connect on Sundays and in meetings throughout the week. It’s difficult to build relationships with meaningful conversations when you don’t see each other.”

**Breaking bread:** “Not sharing meals. We had to rethink serving communion and doing the food pantry safely.”

**Praying:** “No in-person worship services, Maundy Thursday meal, Christmas Eve services, footwashing, and communion” (all usually rich in prayer).

You might make your own list. Ask your group the same questions (above) and compare/contrast your COVID-19 experience with what we know about how the early church functioned. Did certain aspects of the four activities flourish amid/despite dangers? Which activities diminished? Are they necessary?

This pastor concludes: “I think most people who have missed church and the relational/spiritual connections it fosters will be less likely to take for granted the privilege of meeting together. Many experienced the feelings of Paul: ‘I long to see you so that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to make you strong—that is, that you and I may be mutually encouraged by each other’s faith’ (Romans 1:11-12 NIV).” Do you agree?

—Helen Tellez

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**Helen Tellez** has been a writer, editor, and copy editor for church and secular organizations for more than four decades. Formerly from northern Indiana, she now resides in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, with her husband, José, where they run a clothing alterations business. Being married to José for 18 years has opened her eyes to the world beyond rural, white America, and she is grateful for the changes in her Christian perspective.

## Resources for this session

### *Salt & Light Videos*

These teaching videos are great for leader preparation or introducing each session. They are available on [MennoMedia's YouTube channel](#). **Naomi Yoder** is the presenter for Unit 2, Church Means Assembly. She serves on the pastoral team of East Goshen Mennonite Church in Indiana.