

A Night to Remember



PREPARE | GATHER | **ENGAGING THE PAST** | NAMING THE PRESENT | DISCERNING THE FUTURE | NEXT STEPS

ENGAGING THE PAST—ACTIVITY

In this activity the congregation remembers, year by year or decade by decade, events from the past—wonderful events, challenging events, and anything in between. This activity could be accompanied by a meal together, which could be scheduled at the beginning, middle, or end of the activity.

Time needed for activity

An evening

Group size

Any number of current members and regular visitors

Steps for Activity

1. Do some prep work:
 - a. Try to identify some anchoring milestones in the life of your church (date of the establishment of the church, dates of significant renovations or moves of the physical space, names and dates of each lead pastor's tenure).
 - b. Try to identify all of the pastors or missionaries who were born in or who spent time in your congregation while they were growing up.
 - c. Try to learn how many baptisms, professions of faith, weddings, and funerals took place within your congregation over its history.
 - d. Find a way to share all of this information with your congregation either prior to or during this activity.
2. Obtain a roll of butcher paper. Prior to the event, roll out the paper to a length that covers an entire wall of the room in which you'll be hosting the activity. Hang the paper at a height that enables people to reach it easily.
3. Divide the length of butcher paper, by vertical lines, into large sections. The sections will correspond to years or decades in your congregation's life depending on whatever is most appropriate for the length of your church's history (for example, 10 years per section). Mark the paper with some of the anchoring dates identified in Step 1a.
4. Begin the evening with a time of prayer and dwelling in God's Word. Psalm 121 can be a helpful text because it describes what it's like to begin a journey with God as your help.
5. Ask participants to identify events/processes/people from the past, writing a brief description on the relevant section of the timeline. Encourage people to name difficult memories as well as positive memories. If people are tending to keep everything positive, ask if there are any painful memories. If people are only sharing painful memories, ask how they've seen God's faithfulness. Make sure they indicate, if possible, the year or decade in which each event happened.
6. After everyone has had a chance to contribute a few items to the timeline, have the facilitator read each note. When appropriate, ask if the person who wrote the note would be willing to elaborate on the event.
7. After reading all the notes, ask if any events have been missed.
8. At the end of the remembering time, ask people to identify how they see God's hand at work through the life of the congregation. Try to identify themes or life-cycle stages (like the ones found in [George Bullard's](#) book).

9. Lead a time of prayer in which congregation members are asked to participate by praising God for his faithfulness (praise), asking for forgiveness in connection with certain events (confession), and voicing concerns and longings related to the past (lament and hope).
10. Decide if there are four or five signature events that are important enough or representative enough to be named in a future worship service and processed through praise, thanksgiving, confession, lament, etc. This might be a decision that involves the spiritual leaders (council) of the church.
11. Take pictures of the paper so that the memories can be captured for posterity or shared with people who were not able to participate in the activity.
12. Allow the paper to remain in place for a few weeks so that people who couldn't come to the event can see it.

Option: Instead of being asked to identify events/processes/people from the past, participants could be asked to identify ways in which the congregation did or didn't live up to its calling, its name, or its founding aspirations. Remember that when identifying ways in which your church may have fallen short, the most powerful examples are usually the ones where we bear some of the responsibility, not just the ones where other people (not me!) are to blame.

Facilitator's Questions

After the activity, allow time for discussion around some questions like these:

1. What values/virtues/passions do you see in your past that you can carry into the future?
2. Which people or groups from your past do you need to honor?
3. What mistakes, misuses of power, and conflicts should you acknowledge and/or confess together?
4. With whom do you need to reconcile?*
5. What hardships do you need to grieve or lament?*
6. What do you need to thank God for?
7. What are some key moments when you saw the Holy Spirit lead you into something you wouldn't have been able to do yourself?
8. How has your community been transformed in big or little ways because of God's work in and through you?

*If this question leads to a sense that there is work to be done in the areas of reconciliation and/or healing, then the group should feel free to seek assistance from [Pastor Church Resources](#).