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A table of contents for *Reformation & Revival* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_ref-rev-01.php

Reformation
& Revival



A Quarterly Journal for Church Leadership

Volume 3, Number 4 • Fall 1994

The Nomadic Search for a Local Church

Walter J. Chantry

And they were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. And everyone kept feeling a sense of awe; and many wonders and signs were taking place through the apostles. And all those who had believed were together, and had all things in common; and they began selling their property and possessions, and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need. And day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart, praising God, and having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved (Acts 2:42-47).

85

There is an increasing restlessness among American Christians. People are drifting from church to church in the same locality, hoping to find a level of God's blessing that seems now to be absent. As God has blessed us with the multiplication of Reformed ministries in many localities, Calvinists have joined the game of musical churches. Round go the gypsies, and we watch to see where they will sit down next.

Complaints that make Christians into spiritual nomads are that the churches are not meeting spiritual needs, that they feel alienated from other saints, that the Lord is still far away. Especially do the young saints evidence this wistful, transitory quality of life.

In every generation young Christians are pummeled by the demands of starting a marriage, a family, a new career. At the beginning the financial, social and job pressures are most intense. A longing eye is cast at the older, more established saints who seem to have life together. Their homes are rooted and rock solid. Their jobs are advancing. They seem to have plenty of time to study God's Word, pray, fellowship with each other. The young do not feel that they share in the stability. They are far from the level of doctrine or prayer-life of this core in the church. There is a feeling of not belonging. The

temptation of the vagabond to move along is intense.

The truth is that there is no church anywhere that can carry spiritual depth of doctrine or prayer to anyone caught up in the endless demands of this age. There is no congregation that can make a person feel part of the inner-fellowship of its assembly while he allows himself to be buffeted by the noise and time-demands common to mankind.

Those who now seem to have such a placid and privileged position in local churches once faced the same array of pressures that are so daunting to young Christians. But they, as the believers described in Acts 2:42, succeeded in forming constant habits of attendance at worship where prayer and teaching of biblical doctrine were central. At great effort and cost, they determined to forge a fixed pattern of life to be present when a church prayed, worshipped, and gathered together for fellowship. Now it has become part of their lives, and now they reap the benefits of time and energy invested through the years.

Usually spiritual blessing and feeling part of the church does not arise so much from superior spiritual strengths in the church as in determined commitment to devote ourselves to continual teaching, fellowship and prayer. When someone makes it a priority to gather with the saints in this way, he usually feels the satisfaction of intimacy with God's people, and he grows in spiritual wisdom, prayer and grace.

There is no perfect church in doctrine or graciousness. It is easy to blame our indecision, lack of discipline and lack of commitment on the local church. But spiritual weakness and a sense of alienation from God's people are quite often traceable to a very elementary failure in those who criticize the church. If we do not devote ourselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship and if we do not continue to meet together, the most aggressive nomadic search for inner satisfaction is destined to failure.

Author

Walter J. Chantry is author of several titles, including, *Today's Gospel: Authentic or Synthetic?* (Banner of Truth) and *Praises for the King of Kings* (Banner of Truth). He is senior pastor of Grace Baptist Church, Carlisle, Pennsylvania.