

Why after church fellowship is important

Hint: It's not about the food

Every Sunday we gather together for worship and fellowship with God and one another. We sing praises to God together, we pray together, we offer each other the peace of our Lord Jesus Christ, we hear the Word of God together, and together, we fellowship around the table of Holy Communion. This, however, is not where our Sunday fellowship ends.



After our regular Sunday worship service, we also gather together around food and drink in the church hall and continue our time of fellowship. While no-one would debate the importance of fellowship within the context of our worship service, we ought not in any way see our after-church fellowship as less important or even an optional extra. I realise that Sundays can be busy times for families in our day and age and there are times when people have to dash away straight after worship for various reasons, or at times, miss worship altogether. Sometimes even getting to church can be an effort and so those who are committed to coming in spite of the difficulties, ought to be commended—even if that's all they can manage.

There are, however, a number of reasons why after-church fellowship is an important part of our church life. For starters, it's not about the food. That doesn't mean that the food and drink are unimportant. The food and drink are the catalyst to our fellowship—the context within which fellowship happens. There is something special that happens when fellowship is shared around a common table—and Christians have been doing it for over 2000 years.

After-church fellowship provides the congregation with a number of benefits. Here are five that come to mind. There may be many more:

1. After-church fellowship provides members and adherents of the congregation and those who are visiting, an opportunity to get to know one another better—to become friends rather than just acquaintances who only have time for a nod of greeting on Sunday mornings.
2. After-church fellowship provides the opportunity for connections to be made along, not just spiritual lines, but also along lines of common interests. For example, I have an interest in technology. It's great to then be able to catch up with others who are also interested in technology. Other lines of connection may be mothers with small children who enjoy sharing notes with other mums with small children—or people who are in similar lines of work. The possibilities are endless.
3. As a result of these first two reasons, in particular, after-church fellowship is where relationships are built and maintained—especially if we don't get to see one another during the week. The Christian church is primarily about us, together and individually, building a relationship with God. Next to that, however, is building relationships with others of like spiritual mind—to share with others our journey of faith—our struggles and victories.

4. The Sunday worship service, combined with after-church fellowship, provides the best opportunity for pastoral care to happen within the life of the congregation. I reckon that about 85% of general pastoral care happens on Sunday mornings. People whose relationships have been built on a solid foundation of faith and trust, through regular fellowship, will grow stronger in their faith. There will be opportunities to care and pray for one another—to share one another's joys and to help carry one another's burdens. Remember, the church is a family and family members are meant to love and care for one another.
5. Last, but by no means least, after-church fellowship is the best way to get to know your minister and for your minister to get to know you. If you arrive just before (or just after) the service starts and leave straight away after the service finishes, your minister will not get to know you. It's that simple. He or she will not get to personally fellowship with you—will not get to know your interests, your gifts and graces or your needs. Likewise you will not get to know the minister—will not get to know how he or she "ticks"—what makes him or her do what they do or understand the burden he or she carries for each member of the congregation—including you.

So, in conclusion, after-church fellowship around a cup of tea or coffee and food—whether it be sandwiches, quiche, and chocolate cake or simply a packet of Arnott's Assorted biscuits, is a vital part of the life and ministry of the worshipping congregation. It is where members of the wider and particular church family get to know and love each other and where Christian life is not only encouraged but also supported and cared for.

See you after worship.

Grace and peace,

Allan