

Reclaiming Lost Members and Dealing with Objections

There's good news: the Holy Spirit is convicting former members of your church to return. These non-attending members are "ripe" for an invitation to come home.

There are three basic steps in reclaiming lost members:

1. Get names and find out why people left.
2. Visit the former members and seek to reclaim them, listening to them and inviting them to events.
3. Nurture these new believers into a renewed commitment to Christ and His church.

GETTING NAMES OF NON-ATTENDING MEMBERS

- *Church records*
- *Church guest book*
- *Referrals from Adventist relatives/friends*
- *Church school records*

In large congregations many names on the church books may not be recognized by church board members. Probably the simplest way to discover who these people are is to distribute a list of unfamiliar names to the church members, asking them to fill in any information they have about any names on the list. Amazing Facts has prepared a sample form (taken from Fordyce Detamore's *Seeking His Lost Sheep*) that members can fill out regarding former members. See attachment for printable form.)

In small congregations current members are likely to remember the unpleasant situations that led to members' leaving. In some cases, present members may not desire to visit former members. Prayer, apologies and some mediation may be necessary, but healing is always possible through the grace of Christ.

VISITING NON-ATTENDING MEMBERS

It's a good idea to visit in pairs. "God never designed that, as a rule, His servants should go out singly to labor" (*Evangelism*, p. 73).

Wherever possible, "match up" visiting members with the ones being visited according to similar cultural backgrounds, careers, income levels, family backgrounds, etc.

Consult with your pastor before setting out on your mission.

Be a Christ-like friend. Remember that most of your job consists of attentive and sympathetic listening.

Pull over before you are within view of the house and pray for the Holy Spirit's guidance.

When you go to the door, you can say something like this:

"Hi, I'm _____ and this is _____. We're with the _____ Seventh-day Adventist Church. We wanted to come by and get acquainted."

Be friendly and warm but not too gushy. If they invite you inside, ask about job, family, and other friendship builders. After a few minutes or when it comes up naturally in conversation, ask:

"You used to attend our church. How long ago was that? Have you thought about coming back to our church?"

This may open up a lengthy discussion. Listen attentively, making sure you hear all they have to say. Reassure them that the church family will seek a resolution if needed, and wants to see them back again. Before you leave, be sure to invite them to the 05 Revival.

"And the redeemed will be sharers in His joy, as they behold, among the blessed, those who have been won to Christ through their prayers, their labors, and their loving sacrifice" (The Great Controversy, p. 647).

A FEW DO'S

1. Get to the point within a few minutes.
2. Listen kindly; listen interestedly; listen calmly.
3. Always close your visit with prayer.
4. Give a brief invitation to come out to the evening seminar meeting or to church the next Sabbath.
5. Leave immediately after prayer.

SUGGESTED CLOSINGS TO A VISIT

Close your visit something like this: 'Well, we must be going. [That statement always relaxes people!] But before we leave, let's just bow our heads for a

moment of prayer.' And as you are saying this, just bow your head and start praying a short, sincere prayer. In your prayer, you can say things like, "Help him to know that we love him and long for him to come back." "Forgive us for the hurt we in the church have caused him, and may he know there's a welcome awaiting him upon his return." "May his children be safe in following his footsteps, and may they lead for sure to heaven at last." (*Seeking His Lost Sheep*, p. 76).

When inviting him to a church event, don't try to squeeze out a promise that he will attend. This will undo the good you have done. Your whole visit should be conducted in a casual, friendly way, endeavoring to leave the former member relaxed, with a knowledge that you really love him and care about his return.

A FEW DON'TS

1. Don't betray the backslider's confidence.
2. Don't act shocked.
3. Don't defend anyone.
4. Don't stay long. Ten to fifteen minutes is usually long enough.
5. Don't dismiss a backslider as hopeless because he is too far away.
6. Don't argue about church standards.

NURTURING THEM BACK

1. After your initial visit, put their name on the church list for social events (NOT solicitation events).
2. Stay in touch. From time to time, telephone the former member, keeping him informed on interesting church-family news.
3. Use important coming events as an excuse for a return visit to invite him out.
4. Ask someone of his type or age group to call and get acquainted.
5. Help solve personal problems that obstruct church attendance, such as babysitting, transportation, or care-giving. Take a personal interest in his children.
6. If appropriate, occasionally stop by their home with a book, a loaf of bread, or a basket of fruit.

7. Send in their name and address for the *Review and Herald* and *Signs of the Times*.
8. Put forth every effort in your power to see that the former member is present during a call for surrender or at a special Sabbath morning consecration service (baptism).
9. If the family has financial needs, present them to the appropriate church leaders/department.

If a first visit goes well but the non-attending member person does not want a follow-up visit, you can give them a copy of a non-threatening book. Be sure to have your phone number written inside in case they want to contact you. Then allow the Holy Spirit to work on them through the printed word.

DEALING WITH OBJECTIONS

During your visits the people may raise objections to returning to church. This does not mean they are not interested, it may mean that the Holy Spirit is deeply convicting them and they are confused. Deal with them kindly, lovingly, and positively. Listen to their objections, seek God for wisdom, and encourage them to trust in Jesus for the solution to every problem they face.

"Your success will not depend so much upon your knowledge and accomplishments, as upon your ability to find your way to the heart." *Gospel Workers*, p. 193.

By coming close to the person and winning his confidence, he will feel safe in expressing his feelings and problems to you. Listen to what he is saying, even if his ideas are preposterous. Listen kindly while asking tactful questions. You might say, "I'm glad you expressed yourself." Or, "I know that God has the answer; let's just pray and ask God to help us find a solution." This puts you in a different light; it isn't you on one side and him on the other. You are on his side asking God for the answer.

"If the worker keeps his heart uplifted in prayer, God will help him to speak the right word at the right time." *Gospel Workers*, p. 120.

PRINCIPLES FOR HANDLING OBJECTIONS

1. Remember NEVER ARGUE. You may win the argument, but lose the person.
2. Anticipate an objection by posing it as a question (before they do) and then answer it with Scripture.
3. Give short, concise answers, asking if the answer clears up the issue.
4. The most effective way to answer objections—FFF

- Feel—"I understand how you feel."
- Felt—"Many others in your present situation have felt exactly the same way."
- Found—"But, they have found..."

USE THE OBJECTION TO ENCOURAGE A POSITIVE DECISION.

There is a definite technique for discovering the open door and passing right through it to a favorable decision. Here is the procedure:

1. Listen carefully to the objection. Make sure you have an objection and not an excuse by asking if that is the only reason for not deciding. For example, "If this issue was cleared up, would you then see your way clear to come back to church?"
2. Ask for the reason for the objection.
3. Show the person that you understand the objection by repeating it in your own words. "Do I understand that the issue which is really holding you back is the opposition of your husband?" Get a commitment that if the objection was removed, he would make a positive decision.
4. Ask him to take the problem to the Lord in prayer, and remind him that with God all things are possible. Make a commitment to pray for him, and then encourage Him to step out in faith and follow the Lords leading.
5. If the person is not ready to make a decision at that time, always leave the door open for a follow up visit latter. You could end the visit like this, "Before go, can I have a special pray for you, asking God to help you in this situation and give you wisdom to do the right thing."

The search for straying members is a real battle in a real life-or-death war. Intercessory prayer is the most powerful weapon in this conflict. Solicit a commitment from your church family to pray each day, perhaps at an established time, for the non-attending members on the list. Pray for those doing visitation as well.

May God richly bless you as you work side-by-side with Him seeking each priceless sheep who has strayed from the fold.