Do not talk of your lack of faith and your sorrows and sufferings. The tempter delights to hear such words. When talking on gloomy subjects, you are glorifying him. We are not to dwell on the great power of Satan to overcome us. Often we give ourselves into his hands by talking of his power. Let us talk instead of the great power of God to bind up all our interests with His own. Tell of the matchless power of Christ, and speak of His glory.¹

What are we to make of these statements? How can we reconcile statements that appear to close up the expression of feelings with what we know about unresolved guilt, disappointment, anger, hurt, etc., in the inactive member? Is White telling us we must seal up all these feelings and that the Caring Ministry callers should avoid dealing with emotions? Certainly this cannot be true.

There must be a middle ground of balance that allows a healthy expression and resolution of feelings while avoiding the pitfalls and dangers lurking nearby. No doubt White was concerned about a number of potential problems.

One potential problem might be described as "wallowing." It has often been said that "misery loves company." Some people love nothing better than to recite experiences where they feel they have been wronged or to tell the awful details of some problem in the church. Criticism, fault-finding, and self-pity are contagious, and White warned:

It is not wise to gather together all the unpleasant recollections of a past life,—its iniquities and disappointments,—to talk over them and mourn over them until we are overwhelmed with discouragement.²

¹Ibid., p. 253.

It is also a mistake to lean upon a counselor and become dependent upon that person for continual support.

Never encourage men to look to you for wisdom. When men come to you for counsel, point them to the One who reads the motives of every heart. . . . No persons must act as confessors; no man must be exalted as supreme.¹

We must also guard against involvement with other people that leads to inappropriate intimate behavior. Stephen Grunlan's recent Ministry article warned how easy it is to step over this line.

We are all attracted to attentive, interested, and responsive listeners, those who show a real interest in us and to whom we can talk freely. Such concern and listening sets the stage for intimate sharing verbally, and it is often only a short step from intimate communication to intimate behavior.²

These concerns for potential dangers in the close, personal encounter make it imperative that the Caring Ministry callers be well trained and that there be a strong support system that provides feedback as the calls are debriefed. If the callers have a strong spiritual motivation, are in touch with their own feelings, and are perceptive to the emotions of the inactive member, they will be sensitive to what is happening in the relationship. They will know how to "Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep."³

³Rom 12:15.
There is a place for the appropriate expression of feelings. Doubts, criticism, anger, etc., should not be spread about the whole church. But in the setting of a Caring Ministry visit, it may be extremely helpful for the trained and sensitive caller to help the inactive member explore and understand what has happened and what has been keeping that person from a fulfilling experience in the church.

Let us also cite the counsel from White which encourages just this type of personal relationship with backsliders.

There is need of shepherds who, under the direction of the Chief Shepherd, will seek for the lost and straying. This means the bearing of physical discomfort and the sacrifice of ease. It means a tender solicitude for the erring, a divine compassion and forbearance. It means an ear that can listen with sympathy to heartbreaking recitals of wrong, of degradation, of despair and misery.

When the wounds have been cleansed and the poisons removed, the flesh is ready to mend and the healing process begins.

Helping the Dropout Return

The primary goal of the Caring Ministry is to minister to the needs of people so that healing takes place and the dropouts are restored to oneness with Jesus Christ. When this is accomplished, the way is opened to realize our second goal of bringing them back to active fellowship in the Church.

Callers in the Caring Ministry want very much to see inactive members return to the church. Sometimes they want it so

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1White, Gospel Workers, p. 184.
much that they are over-anxious or attempt to "problem-solve" and take shortcuts to achieve this goal. The seminar training is not complete until we have prepared the callers to understand the important topic of returning and restoration.

If there is any point in the relationship of caller to inactive member where it is important to be sensitive to inner feelings, it is in knowing the readiness of the dropout to return. To be asked prematurely would mean a negative answer and further distance from the church. To be ready but not asked would mean frustration and perhaps the feeling of being unwanted.

Participants in the Caring Ministry seminar are asked to imagine how the dropout might feel when considering returning to the church. Positive thoughts and feelings might include happiness at the prospect of seeing old friends, joy in being back home in worship, or a sense of peace and closeness with God. However, negative thoughts and feelings might be frightening. "What will people say?" "What if I fail again?" "What if the old problem comes up like before?"

Callers can assure dropouts that God will give them a new heart to return to Him. "...I will give them an heart to know me, that I am the Lord: and they shall be my people, and I will be their God: for they shall return unto me with their whole heart."1 They can also be sure that God will never reject anyone who comes back to Him.2

1Jer 24:7.

22 Chr 30:6-9, John 6:37.
Unfortunately it may be a little more difficult to find that same complete acceptance in the church. Even though we have tried to prepare the church and develop a caring attitude, there may be some who find it hard to accept backsliders into full fellowship.

When one who has wandered far in sin seeks to return to God, he will encounter criticism and distrust. There are those who will doubt whether his repentance is genuine, or will whisper, "He has no stability; I do not believe that he will hold out." These persons are doing not the work of God but the work of Satan, who is the accuser of the brethren. Through their criticisms the wicked one hopes to discourage that soul, and to drive him still farther from hope and from God. Let the repenting sinner contemplate the rejoicing in heaven over the return of the one that was lost. Let him rest in the love of God and in no case be disheartened by the scorn and suspicion of the Pharisees.¹

It is very important that callers help the inactive members work their way through the positive and negative feelings associated with coming back. They must be realistic and not promise things they cannot deliver. It is unwise to promise that everything will work out since "we have a new pastor now," or "the whole church wants you to come back."

The wise caller may even suggest a number of options if attending the formal worship seems too difficult: attending a musical concert, joining an informal social activity, helping with a project. Some returning members have found the path back to the church a little easier when they were allowed to slip in a "side door."

¹White, Christ's Object Lessons, p. 190.
The first time back is the hardest. One returning member who had been away for twenty-five years told me that she took a bus to the church. Alighting from the bus, she stood and looked at the church building with fear. Gathering all her courage, she crossed the street and entered the front door. Once inside, a sense of great relief and joy came over her. She was home at last and it was a wonderful experience.

One more step may be helpful to make the return complete. Some type of affirmation or sign of acceptance may help the returning member feel that he or she belongs again. Of course, we do not publicly announce that a backslider has returned. A better way may be to quietly tell some close friends so that they may welcome the one who is returning. Asking the returning member to join a Sabbath School class or take some small responsibility may be a welcome token of acceptance. Certainly the pastor will want to affirm the member's renewed commitment and express his own joy at the member's return.

Visitation of Inactive Members

Initiation of the Calling Program

Before the Caring Ministry seminar began, the participants were told that they would not be required to make calls on inactive members. We did this for two reasons: (1) Before the training, they might have felt uncomfortable about visiting dropouts and were not really prepared to make such a commitment; (2) we believed that
their life and fellowship in the church would be strengthened by the seminar experience whether or not they ever called on inactive members.

As we neared the end of the seminar, we talked more about actually calling in the homes of the inactives. We gave the participants specific instructions on how to make a call: phoning ahead for an appointment, preparing for the visit, introductions, building trust and openness, and closure. During the last hour of the seminar, we invited the participants to make a commitment to visit and explained the visitation program.

Our plan was to launch a six-week period of intensive visitation and follow this with a homecoming month. We set a specific time period for the visitation on the assumption that the seminar participants would be more willing to commit themselves to a definite period of visitation than to an open-ended program. It would give them a goal to work toward and the knowledge that they were not signing up for an indefinite period.

We had been praying that the seminar participants would be led by the Holy Spirit to accept the invitation to join the visitation program. Small 3"x5" cards were passed out and the participants were invited to write us a little note indicating whether or not they would be able to join the visitation. In the two seminars conducted as part of this project, fifty-one of the fifty-six persons completing the training volunteered for visitation. They were then paired to form calling partners. We
closed the seminar with a commissioning service using the words of Jesus, "... as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you... Receive ye the Holy Ghost."¹

As the seminar closed, the calling teams were directed to a table on which cards had been placed with the names and addresses of less active and inactive members. The teams were allowed to choose the number of cards they wished and the persons they preferred to visit. When calling teams asked for guidance in selecting names, we suggested people with whom we felt they had some natural point of contact or compatibility.

Loretta and I selected cards from the names that had not been chosen. Sometimes we visited together, and sometimes separately. We felt it was important for our callers to know that we were visiting the inactive members just as they were. We also wanted to be free to go with the callers on their visits when they requested it.

A visit from the Caring Ministry teams did not always come as a total surprise to the inactive members. I had used my pastor's page in the monthly newsletter to talk about caring in the church and mentioned that a group of members would be taking the seminar and learning how to express caring for both active and inactive members. Some callers reported that the inactive members said, "We have been expecting your visit."

¹John 20:21,22.
One unique experience that happened when one caller phoned for an appointment must be reported. She called what she thought was the phone number of our inactive member and reached a lady who happened to have the same first name. Our caller introduced herself and asked if she could come for a visit, explaining that she was part of the church and wanted to express our love and caring for the member. The lady on the other end of the line thought it was someone from her own church. Several minutes into the conversation, both ladies discovered the mistake that had been made. However, the lady thanked our caller, saying that she had been so discouraged in her church and would like to visit a church that cared that much for its inactive members!

Support Groups

As the Caring Ministry calling teams began visiting in the homes of the inactive members, they encountered a wide variety of experiences. Sometimes the dropouts responded with joy and appreciation; other times there was resistance, hostility, or indifference. At this point, our support system was vital so callers would have a place to share their experiences and gather ideas and courage for continued visitation. Almost every study of church visitation programs has pointed out this need.

... there is a tremendous need ... to develop an adequate support system for those who are representing the church as the official visitors. An adequate support system will enhance the present function of the visitation program and it will also insure a continuation of the visitation program for the future. One of the greatest causes of the disintegration of a visitation program to the inactive member is a burnout syndrome on the part
of visitors because they have no place to deal with their own emotions. They become reservoirs of painful emotions, rather than streams of living waters.¹

Because encounter with those in need is anxiety arousing, the network of mutual support in the training group, and between the group and the leaders, must be strong enough to offset the anxiety. Otherwise . . . the anxiety overloads the circuits and trainees abort—physically and/or emotionally.²

A number of other reclaiming programs have set up a support plan based on simultaneous visitation with immediate debriefing.³ They preselect a certain evening to visit inactive members, usually without appointment. Following the visitation, the callers gather at the church for prayer, sharing, and support. This plan has both advantages and disadvantages which are discussed later in the evaluation of the training program. For this project we elected to allow the callers freedom to set up appointments at the convenience of the inactive members. We gathered together on selected Sabbath afternoons for our support groups. This plan also has both advantages and disadvantages.

Our own busy church schedule became our biggest obstacle for the support meetings. We ran the two training seminars essentially

¹Ault, p. 134.


³See Brooks, p. 21; Byron R. Malone, "A Proposed Ministry of Involvement to the Inactive Adults of Daniel Memorial Baptist Church" (D.Min. project report, New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, 1979); and Walter John Ungerer, "The Barnabas Project: The Training of Lay Persons for a Ministry of Pastoral Care to Inactive Church Members" (D.Min. project report, Princeton Theological Seminary, 1983), p. 34.
back to back, leaving very little time for support meetings with
the first group. Holidays and other church events did their best
to sabotage the support sessions. We did manage to have two
support meetings and supplemented this with personal contact with
the callers.

There are a number of very important functions that take
place in the support sessions. A brief outline follows:

Debriefing calls

Returning callers need to tell not only what happened during
the calls but also to share what effect these experiences are
having in terms of their own pain and/or joy.

Keeping confidences

The group needs to be reminded of the importance of keeping
confidences. They need to establish guidelines for appropriate
sharing of information they have learned from the dropouts.

Practicing skills

The visitation experience helps callers realize the value of
the skills. They often appreciate a second opportunity to hear the
skills explained and to practice them within the group. We also
ask the groups to practice good listening skills with each other as
they debrief the calling experiences.

Designing follow-up calls

Many times the callers ask their support group (which is
usually the same small group of people they worked with in the
training seminar) for help in knowing how to continue their visits
and build stronger relationships. Often the group can see possibilities that individual callers may not have considered by themselves.

Providing information about the life of the congregation

Callers need to have current knowledge of what is happening in the life of the church and its future plans so they can share this information with the inactive members.

Spiritual and emotional nurture and fellowship

Callers give a great deal of themselves in caring for others and they need the refreshing encouragement and healing that comes through these times of spiritual and emotional nurturing.

Feedback to leaders and pastors

The pastors and spiritual leaders in the church need to know what the callers are hearing from the inactive and former members. They can then evaluate this information and consider ways to strengthen the life and program of the church.

Evaluation of the calling program

The experiences and insights of the team members can enhance the effectiveness of the calling program. Callers also need to know what progress is being made toward achieving the goals of the Caring Ministry.

Membership Reaffirmation Month

The Caring Ministry program does not use gimmicks or manipulation to get inactive members back to church. It does, however,
strive to make it easy for those who would like to take that first step back. With this thought in mind, we planned a homecoming for the month of June 1983.

Of the four Sabbaths in June, I took the sermon on the first and last weeks. Two former pastors were invited to speak on the Sabbaths in the middle of the month.¹

On the first Sabbath, my topic was, "You Can Have a Second Chance." I used the Biblical story of the prodigal son and compared it to a similar story found in ancient Buddhist teachings,² showing the differences between the two and how God's love and forgiveness restore us to full fellowship.

Elder Arthur Lickey, Stone Tower pastor from 1960 to 1964, spoke the second Sabbath. Because he still lives in the Portland area, he is well known and is loved by more recent members of the church as well. His sermon, "God's Extravagant Love," was a moving and powerful testimony to the love God has for His people.

Elder Don Gray was the much loved pastor of Stone Tower Church from 1974 to 1976. He had planned to speak on the subject, "Never Give Up." When he arrived in Portland from his home in Boise, he had lost his voice and was able to speak only a few words of greeting and encouragement to the congregation. Nevertheless, he was able to personally greet and convey his caring to many of the members.

¹See appendix B for a copy of the homecoming brochure.
²See appendix C.
On the final Sabbath my subject was, "When the Roll Is Called up Yonder." This sermon was designed to emphasize perseverance and faithfulness in our commitment to Jesus Christ.

We planned Sabbath dinners following each of the June worship services. Arrangements were made in the beautiful Laurelhurst Park near the church, but rain each of the first three Sabbaths of June forced us to meet indoors. Caring Ministry team members, divided into three groups, provided food and made arrangements for each of these potlucks.

For the final Sabbath of the month, we encouraged the whole congregation to invite guests home for dinner. In addition to promoting general fellowship among the members of the church, our specific goal for this dinner was to invite inactive members to the homes of our Caring Ministry teams for fellowship around the table. Those who could not invite guests to their homes joined together for a lovely dinner in the church fellowship room. A large number of people responded to this opportunity and invited people to their homes.

Our records indicate that fifty-seven inactive members attended worship during this special month and most of them stayed for the fellowship meals as well. Callers in the Caring Ministry were gratified to see this response and hoped to nurture these returning members into full fellowship in the church.

Follow-up

Follow-up is always the most difficult part of any church program. We are experts at conceiving new ideas and launching new
programs, but sustained effort and follow-through is our "Achilles' heel."

Though it appears frightening at first, the initial visit to the inactive member is probably the easiest. During that visit there is usually social conversation and getting acquainted. Some information and feelings may also be shared that relate to why this person dropped out of the church. But the second, third, and fourth visits are where callers may get discouraged.

The very things which have led to inactivity may stand in the way of an early response to a visit. Cultivation is an important factor. If a church has neglected or ignored an indifferent member for a long period of time, it is not likely that one visit will solve the problem. Numerous visits may be required to win the member to active service. It is necessary that the door be open for a return visit after each contact.¹

Resistance or lack of response tests the caller's perseverance and ability to build a strong relationship. This is where the pastor's support and encouragement are needed.

Returning members may also find the way back strewn with difficulties. There may be habits to overcome and difficult temptations to resist.

The man who deliberately wanders from God in the full blaze of light will find, when he wishes to set his face to return, that briers and thorns have grown up in his path, and he must not be surprised or discouraged if he is compelled to travel long with torn and bleeding feet. The most fearful and most to be dreaded evidence of man's fall from a better state is the fact that it costs so much to get back. The way of return can be gained only by hard fighting, inch by inch, every hour.²

If the Caring Ministry teams were to make contacts among the inactive members, finding either resistance or receptivity, and

¹Brooks, p. 20.
²White, Selected Messages, 2:165.
then neglect to follow through beyond the initial visit, the inactive members would have every reason to believe that their interest was not genuine. This would build even higher walls of resistance for the future. It was for this reason that, when laying strategies for the visitation program, we planned a period of follow-up beyond the June homecoming month, extending until the end of November. During this time visits would continue for those who returned as well as for those who had not yet responded.

Caring Ministry callers need to realize that not all inactive members will respond to their efforts. Ballew has written what he calls the "axiom of visitation," which shows how God balances things.

We visit a lot of people we never get, but we get a lot of people we never visit; but we'd never get a lot of people we never visit if we didn't visit a lot of people we never get.1

There is nothing else that encourages a church to continue caring and motivate callers to keep calling like the return of even one inactive member. The number of reactivated members may not be large, but the rewards of joy and satisfaction are great because the church knows that it has been an extension of the caring ministry of Jesus Christ.

1Ballew, p. 104.
CHAPTER IV

EVALUATION

Evaluation of the Caring Ministry

Following primarily the methodology of qualitative study outlined in Chapter I, it is my purpose to present a descriptive evaluation of the Caring Ministry from four points of view: (1) evaluation of the content and methods used in the training seminar, (2) the response of the inactive members, (3) the learning and growth of the participants/callers, and (4) my personal growth in ministry.

The sources are interviews and surveys taken before the seminar, comments made by the participants during and after the training, post-seminar evaluation responses, reports made by the callers, and attendance patterns of the inactive members. Through their reports and comments, the callers served both as "informants," who described what was happening as they visited the inactive members, and as involved participants, reacting to the seminar and calling program and to the effect it was having in their lives. Thus, the primary focus of this evaluation is the training seminar and calling program as seen through the eyes of the participants/callers.
Integrated along with this data are my own observations and conclusions. As student/researcher, program leader, caller and pastor, I have lived with this program and observed it from all perspectives. In this evaluation I am attempting to bring together the pertinent pieces of information so that the dynamics and issues of the Caring Ministry become apparent.

A few statistics and charts are included, not for the purpose of establishing numbers as the basis of evaluation, but because they provide relevant information to the overall picture of the Caring Ministry.

Before proceeding into this evaluation of the training seminar and calling program at Stone Tower Church, it might be well to review two other evaluations which criticize the Savage model as being overly simplistic.

The Savage model is simple and easily grasped, but perhaps it is too simplistic to explain all the ramifications that cause a person to become inactive.¹

Church people, I think, are often tempted to oversimplify the unchurched and, then, mobilize all their resources into programs that appeal only to a small proportion of this very diverse group. Roozen observed, for example, and I think quite accurately, that the dropouts Savage . . . discusses actually represent only a small proportion of all dropouts. However, church people notice them because, organizationally, they are irritants. Their leaving was painful and came about over particular objections they had to a certain congregation, and often to certain persons within that congregation.²

Even though the critiques of Ault and Walrath do not explain the methodology by which they arrived at these conclusions, we can agree that dropping out is indeed a complex experience and that one

¹Ault, p. 27.

²Walrath, p. 472.
set of answers does not fit all situations. Each church, each individual, is unique. It may also be true that Savage's findings apply more to one denomination than to another, so that we as Seventh-day Adventists, for example, may wonder to what extent the research is relevant to dropouts from our church.

However, the above critical evaluations may have missed the real point of Savage's work. The purpose of this program is not to diagnose with precision the causes of backsliding and apostasy or to reduce the uniqueness of the multitude of dropout experiences to "one size fits all" answers. It is, however, a program that sensitizes the church to hear and respond to the needs of members. In the words of Savage:

I think the most singular, powerful thing about our program is that it teaches lay people and pastors how to hear the pain of another, not only the inactive church members, but with any group or any individual that's in pain. . . . If each church had a crew of thirty or forty callers who could go minister to that pain, the church would have a ministry that would be very relevant in today's society.1

A church with this listening/loving ministry is sensitive to the needs of people and has a set of basic skills and concepts which enable members to reach out in an effort to reclaim inactive members.

Evaluation of the Training Seminar

The collective judgment of the participants in the Stone Tower Caring Ministry seminar was that, though there were a number of areas in which it could be improved, the seminar provided them with the necessary concepts and skills and prepared them through

1Savage, in Spangler, p. 7.
personal sharing and practice so that they were able to enter into this specialized ministry. 

A number of participants expressed a general appreciation for the seminar. One lady who works with youth said:

I was talking with a teenager when she opened up and started telling me some things. I only replied with a few statements when she started crying and told me that she had never been able to talk to anyone. If it had not been for the Caring Seminar, I probably would have closed her off without her being able to talk to me either.

Another lady wrote this note at the end of the seminar:

Thank you so much for presenting such an opportunity. I'm praying that this seminar will continue to be a blessing to all and that it will be a tool in God's work, to bring back into the church those who once were there. P.S. This seminar has been an answer to prayer. God truly is good!

There are several specific areas in which the participants perceived that the seminar was helpful to them, namely, the learning and sharing within small groups, the communication skills, and the relationship between the seminar leaders and the participants.

**Small groups.** The small groups became working units for learning and practicing the skills. Throughout the seminar, various participants commented on how much they appreciated being able to learn and practice in a "safe" environment. One lady said, "It was easier for me to share in a small group." A man, realizing that the learning groups would become support groups in the future, said, "It brought the group together to learn the same concepts so that the group can work together when necessary." Another added that "breaking into small groups was helpful because we were putting some of the learnings into practice one to one."
Not only did the participants appreciate the opportunity to learn and practice in small groups, but during and after the seminar they often spoke of the fellowship and caring that took place within the group. They sensed that this same bonding was what would keep members close to the church family. One person said, "The group gave me opportunity to know my brothers and sisters better and know that they also care. We all have problems and we can learn to listen for them." This was echoed by another who said, "I became more aware of our own church members and their feelings--learning to listen to others and really hear what they were saying."

Each evening's session ended with a closing circle during which time we reflected on that day's experiences and ended with prayer. It was very common to hear the participants say, "This is the type of fellowship the whole church should have. We need to bring more people into this spirit of closeness and caring."

The communication skills. A second area specifically identified as being helpful was the learning and practicing of listening skills. Though many participants felt awkward when first practicing the communication skills, they began to appreciate them as tools that would facilitate openness and build trust.

One participant said, "The skills helped me see how to become more tactful with others." Another added that "practicing the skills we were learning made it easier to help people." One very quiet lady said, "I felt that practicing the skills in twos, sixes, etc., was really helpful even though it almost killed me!"
Bridging communication skills to our spiritual ministry for inactive members was an important step in preparing the participants for the calling program. As is shown below, not everyone made this connection between skills and ministry. Those who did made statements such as the following: "I now have the feeling that learning the skills made me more responsible to be a 'caring' person." Another person said:

I appreciate your showing application of developed listening/counseling skills to church work. I needed to be assured that these skills were appropriate in God's work.

Just before we began the visitation, one caller said,

I believe there's a greater possibility that some will choose to return because we are using these skills than would have been by former methods that to them might come across as basically uncaring.

On the evaluation form supplied at the end of the seminar, the participants were requested to rank the communication skills on a scale, indicating the degree of their understanding and ability to use them. When the scores were averaged, story listening was ranked as the skill that participants best understood and felt most able to use. Neurolinguistics ranked the lowest.

The leadership team. The seminar participants responded warmly to our leadership. Their appreciation was expressed in such words as, "Thank you for helping all of us be able to reach out to someone in need and even understand ourselves better." Another person added, "I could tell that you have put a lot of study, time, and learning in preparing to teach this. You complemented each other very well and the skits and illustrations were well done."
Beyond just the leadership of the seminar, the participants also appreciated seeing my wife and me working as a team and they felt a new closeness to us. As a sample of these expressions, one person wrote at the end of the evaluation sheet,

I appreciate having a real closeness to the pastor and his wife and knowing that they have a lot of real feelings for others, also hurts with others.

While the participants were generous with their appreciation for various aspects of the training seminar, they were also candid and specific about several areas they felt needed improvement.

Time and amount of material. A common criticism was that there was too much time spent sitting on hard chairs. The participants did not say that the sessions were boring or that the program moved too slowly, but that the total time spent sitting was too long. As a sample from among those who complained about the length of time, one person said:

The only problem or weakness was the length of time spent sitting. The problem was not with the seminar but with me. Sitting for so many hours was in itself torture to me. I stuck with it because of a need I felt.

Another participant summarized her feelings with this succinct comment: "It was great, but like campmeeting, there was too much sitting."

Some participants expressed frustration over the amount of material and the time available for learning and practice. One man said, "Time seemed to be cut short just when we were getting into the skills." Another added, "It was too condensed. It was too short a time for both study and application." One of the older ladies commented, "I felt rushed most of the time."
One participant tied the problems of the time element and the amount of material together with this evaluation: "It seemed to be a crash program in learning, and any such program would be tiring."

**Continuity and comprehension.** Some of the participants had difficulty seeing how the various modules fit together and were therefore unable to assimilate the total concept into a useful whole.

In order to follow a three-weekend format for the convenience of the participants and in order to include information relevant to the special needs of Adventist dropouts, we had rearranged or eliminated some modules of the basic program. ¹ This was apparently confusing to some participants. Their reaction was, "By going back and forth in the syllabus, when I go back now, I'm not sure what parts go with what."

The total seminar schedule included twenty-three separate learning modules as well as many practice and sharing sessions. A number of participants expressed their difficulty in understanding how it all fit together. "My problem now is trying to remember what all I should do." "I am a slow thinker and slow learner. Some of the presentations were over my head." One man wrote this evaluation,

The material content and presentation were excellent. However, I do not believe the concepts were transferred and assimilated into the minds of the students to the extent where a working knowledge was achieved. At the close of the seminar I felt at mid-sea, lacking an overall perspective.

¹ See appendix A for the seminar sequence.
Role play. The seminar included a number of role plays to help participants feel what a dropout might experience and to let them practice visitation in a "safe" environment. The participants had mixed reactions to role playing. Some said, "The role plays were very important in helping us apply the information presented." Others gave them a qualified approval: "Role playing helped us assimilate the concepts, but it was not the most beneficial part of the seminar." Several others gave role playing a low rating: "It was the weakest part of the seminar." "Role playing seemed very artificial at times." "Some people took the role plays personally—not as role playing." "Role playing was hard for me to take really seriously, but I still found it helpful."

Spirituality. The most common concern expressed by seminar participants was over a perceived lack of spirituality. The participants used a variety of ways to communicate this concern. One newly baptized member said, "I feel that the meetings should have been held on another day instead of Sabbath," which seemed to be her way of saying that the seminar was not spiritual enough to be held during Sabbath hours. Another couple did not return after the opening Friday evening session, saying that they did not feel comfortable with the program being on Sabbath. Other participants made comments such as, "There was not enough prayer and spiritual points mentioned." "We need to rely on God's help more, not our own." "There was missing, somewhat, a soft, direct approach to Jesus' love and soon coming, and trust in God." "There needed to be a greater emphasis on the Holy Spirit's power to help us."
In previous seminars we had conducted while in southern California, my wife and I had also sensed a need to make the seminar a stronger spiritual experience. In our planning for the Stone Tower seminars we had therefore added more time for individual and group prayer as well as more worship and fellowship time. We also selected a number of Bible texts specifically related to different segments of the seminar. These were painted on banners which were introduced at appropriate times and hung around the room so as to continually surround the group with the themes of Scripture. While all these things were good in themselves, they did not eliminate the concern we continued to hear that the seminar was lacking in spirituality.

What did the participants mean when they said the seminar was lacking in spirituality? Was it the program in general or was there something specific and identifiable? Some of the participants singled out the emphasis on the learning of skills and the psychological concepts, saying "There was too much psychology. It needs to be more Christ-centered." "The stress was on knowledge, not the love of God." Some people seemed to equate the learning and practicing of communication skills with using human methods to do the Lord's work. A number of them said that the role plays were artificial and "gamey." One young man with whom I spoke at length about this problem felt that we were training callers to use psychology and communication skills in such a way that it would manipulate the inactive members instead of loving them with a

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1See appendix D for a list of banners and times when they were used.
spiritual caring. For this reason he resisted making a strong commitment to the program. He also did not do any visiting of inactive members.

In order to better understand what I was hearing from the participants and to find out if this concern regarding spirituality came only from those I had trained, I talked with three other Caring Ministry trainers. In each case, they responded immediately that participants in their seminars had frequently expressed a similar concern over spirituality.

Curtis Miller is the Personal Ministries Director for the North Pacific Union Conference. He conducts the Caring Ministry training seminar throughout the five states of the Northwest.¹ Reactions of participants in his seminars have led him to conclude that there is too much psychology and not enough practical help to meet the unique needs of the Adventist dropout. He has rearranged the sequence of modules so that those which are more psychology oriented do not come on Sabbath. When asked if he thought we needed all the skills in the present seminar format, he responded:

I wish we could teach more. The ministry to inactive members is such a sensitive and important work that our callers need all the skills they can get. So I have added two additional modules on conflict management and temperament profiles.

When queried about this increasing the overload of material, he suggested that we hand pick the participants and look for those who are younger and are able to grasp the skills more quickly.

As Miller and I concluded our discussion, he spoke of the difficulty he faces in presenting so much material in such a short space of time. When he travels from his office in Portland to various churches to present the seminar, he must pack everything into two back-to-back weekends, Friday night through Sunday night. He said:

If I did not have the problem of time and distance, I would much prefer another system that would spread out the material and allow the participants to assimilate it better.

Sherman Jefferson, a pastor in southern California, has taken Savage's Lab I and II and several related workshops. He has used the concepts and some of the skills with his church board and in other teaching situations. Because of some of the reactions he has received in these limited exposures to the material, he has not conducted the full seminar in his church. He said, "The main reason I have not done so is that I am concerned that the seminar is not as spiritual as my members would want it to be."

Al Long coordinates the church-growth program among the approximately twenty-five Adventist churches in the Willamette Valley in Oregon and has conducted the Caring Ministry training seminar in many of them. On several occasions participants in his program have told him they saw little difference between his seminar and the current "in" seminars which feature group therapy and the modern concepts of psychology. Long said:

I believe one of the main problems is the secular vocabulary used in the seminar. Dr. Savage's background in clinical psychology and as a management consultant has led him to include a lot of technical terminology. This may cause our participants to feel that we are training them to become "astute observers" rather than caring individuals.
We need to use Biblical vocabulary and Biblical illustrations and study the methods Christ used in personal ministry. In this way we can direct our people's attention to what God has done and is doing to reclaim the lost.

Long also said that our people want to know how to use the Bible when visiting dropouts. He is currently developing some resource material on the Biblical theme of encouragement for the callers to use in ministry.

Pulling together, then, the responses from our own participants and the experiences of the other trainers, I see a number of common themes. Participants view the training seminar as a valuable experience of learning to understand the dropout and to acquire some skills that help them communicate with the inactive member. Participants also feel very positive about the relationships that develop during the seminar and would like to see this caring and sharing extended to the church at large where it would develop unity and bonding within the church family.

However, participants and trainers alike have expressed dissatisfaction over the length of time and the amount of material compressed into the seminar and their frustration in not being able to assimilate it into usable tools for ministry. They have also told us that the seminar seemed weighted more toward knowledge, psychology, and skills, leaving them without adequate heart preparation, Biblical tools, and a sense of working in cooperation with the Holy Spirit in ministry to inactive members.

The concerns expressed by the participants and the other trainers contain seeds for suggestions of ways to improve the seminar. In the section entitled, "Improving the Effectiveness of