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A Lay Visitation Program to Help Reclaim Inactive Members at the Hillsboro Seventh-day Adventist Church in Hillsboro, Oregon

Rodolfo N. Salazar

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ABSTRACT

A LAY VISITATION PROGRAM TO HELP RECLAIM
INACTIGVE MEMBERS AT THE HILLSBORO
SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH IN
HILLSBORO, OREGON

by

Rodolfo N. Salazar

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ABSTRACT OF GRADUATE STUDENT RESEARCH

Project Document

Andrews University

Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

Title: A LAY VISITATION PROGRAM TO HELP RECLAIM INACTIGVE MEMBERS AT THE HILLSBORO SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH IN HILLSBORO, OREGON

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Problem

There are many members in the Hillsboro Seventh-day Adventist Church who do not attend the weekly worship service on a regular basis. More than half of the members on the books are inactive. For the last 5 years, attendance at the Hillsboro Church has declined. The present study determined the impact of a visitation program on church attendance. In the program attending church members visited inactive members.

Method

Theological considerations on the importance of the involvement of church members in visitation led to the development of a visitation program. This program was

implemented at the Hillsboro Church and evaluated for effectiveness in increasing attendance.

Results

Over 20 members of the Hillsboro Church were trained, equipped, and coached to do the work of visitation. Church attendance grew by 5% from the previous year to a level that was 3.1% higher than the average attendance for the previous 10 years. Two inactive members began attending church again. Members who no longer wanted to be on the church books were identified. And a culture of church attendance was started.

Conclusions

The work of ministry is not for pastors only. The responsibility to reach out to inactive members in the local church falls on the active church members themselves. When these members are properly trained, equipped, and coached, they will be part of searching for those who are no longer attending church. These local church leaders are eager and willing to do the work of God if given the opportunity. Moreover, these leaders should make specific plans to reach the growing numbers of inactive members.

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Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

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A Project Document

Presented in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Ministry

by

Rodolfo N. Salazar

December 2011

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

There are many members in the Hillsboro Seventh-day Adventist Church who do not attend the weekly worship service on a regular basis. In my preliminary research, about half of the members are inactive. People die spiritually when they are not attending a church regularly. My personal experience and observations indicates that multiple ministerial responsibilities impede pastors from visiting all the inactive members and inviting them to be part of the weekly spiritual renewal of the Worship Service.

Statement of the Task

The task of this dissertation project was to develop, implement, and evaluate a visitation program done by church members aimed at reaching inactive members.

Justification of the Project

The Bible gave us a mandate "to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10 NKJV; all biblical references taken from the NKJV unless otherwise noted). The biblical narrative in Luke 15 tells us that when one sheep was missing, the shepherd went to find it. Adventist theology teaches the priesthood of all believers. The responsibility to seek the missing members is not just the job of the pastors. It is also the responsibility of the local church leaders to take care of their parishioners.

The writings of Ellen White affirm that it is the responsibility of every believer to go after the sheep who left the fold. Ellen White emphasized the fact that it is not only the pastor's duty but also the duty of church members to be involved in the work of saving souls.

There is a tendency for church members to rely solely on the clergy to visit members when they stop coming to church and seldom consider it as part of their responsibilities as leaders and members of the local church.

Limitations of the Project

This project was conducted in an English speaking church of about 200 members in a large metropolitan area during the first semester of 2011. I believe that in a larger church, where the pool of inactive members is larger, greater time would be invested in such a project and the results may increase.

The second limitation that I encountered is that I am not the pastor of the Hillsboro Seventh-day Adventist Church. Therefore, I depended upon the pastor to plan and coach the members. With other school and church activities, the priorities of the church pastor were different than my priorities.

Description of the Dissertation Process

Chapter 1 addresses the problem of lack of attendance, the task of the project, and the justification for the project. It also includes the study limitations, describes the dissertation process, gives expectations, and lists the definitions of terms.

Chapter 2 will examine biblical passages where God is looking for people and is doing personal visitation to bring discouraged and disheartened human beings into a saving relationship with Him. It will also cover Ellen White's writings on the importance

and the value of doing personal visitation.

Chapter 3 will review current literature on how to have an effective visitation program for inactive members and how to equip church members for the task of bringing inactive members into the church.

Chapter 4 will describe the organization of the project from beginning to end. The first part will discuss how the program came about and also give statistics of church attendance in the Hillsboro Church compared to the statistics of church attendance in the Oregon Conference. The second part of the chapter will give a report of the materials produced to train church members, the training sessions, and the visitation program itself.

Chapter 5 will cover the results of the project, conclusions, and recommendations will be given.

Expectations From This Dissertation

The first expectation of this program is that it will educate and encourage members of the Hillsboro Church in doing the work of visitation of inactive members. Hopefully, the church member involvement in this project will increase their average attendance in the Hillsboro Church not only of inactive members but of members who attend infrequently.

The second expectation for this project is that it could be helpful to churches in North America and beyond to have a dynamic visitation program for inactive members.

Definitions of Terms

Inactive Members: This refers to members who no longer attend church. These *Inactive Members* are not shut-ins, but members who chose to stop coming to church.

Church Attendance: Someone who was absent for more than a year in the Hillsboro Adventist Church was considered not to be attending church. Sporadic attenders who came once or twice a year were considered to be attending church.

Church Members: This term will be used most of the time to refer to local unpaid members of the Hillsboro Seventh-day Adventist church, who attend church regularly and are actively involved in the life and mission of the local church congregation.

Visitor: this term refers to the unpaid active church member who is doing the work of visiting inactive members.

Oregon Conference: This refers to the Oregon Conference of the Seventh-day Adventists, the organization that the Hillsboro Church is part of and by which this author is employed.

CHAPTER II
THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION ON VISITATION
AND RECLAMATION

Introduction

Personal visitation is at the core of God's method of reaching and transforming people. God visiting people in a very intimate and personal way is the motif of the Bible story from Genesis to Revelation. Over and over in the biblical narratives God shows how concerned He is for His creatures and how desperately He wants to save His children from the curse of sin by His personal intervention—His personal visitation. We serve a God of second chances. God is in the business of reclaiming fallen human beings through personal visitation, thereby transforming the sinner's life into a life of active service for others.

The thesis of this dissertation is that a visitation program done by the members on behalf of those who have stopped coming to church will result in not only bringing people back to church and filling the pews but will be key to the salvation of many inactive members.

The Bible tells us the importance of attending church, “not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching (Heb 10:25). It also tells us that where two or three are gathered in Jesus’ name, God will be in the midst of them (Matt

18:20). Corporate worship is God's chosen method to bless the church. It was when members were in one accord, praying and searching the scriptures that the Holy Spirit was poured on the early church (Acts 2).

There is a spiritual blessing in corporate worship that one cannot obtain in a private personal devotional time. The Bible says: "Praise the LORD! Sing to the LORD a new song, and His praise in the assembly of saints" (Ps 149:1). When members stop attending church, they miss the blessing God has for them "in the assembly of saints" and their spiritual health declines.

When church members visit inactive members, they are doing God's salvific work. When elders and deacons visit people who have stopped coming to church, it tells the person being visited that church members care enough to take the time to be in their homes, to write a letter, or make a phone call. It also communicates that people other than the employed minister want to see them in heaven and wish them to be part of God's wonderful future.

In the first part of this theological reflection it will be established that God is in the business of reclaiming sinners through personal visitation. The Bible is a compilation of stories about God visiting fallen man in order to save them from their sins. Several biblical passages in the Old and New Testaments will be examined to illustrate God's personal involvement in visiting and reclaiming his straying, sinful sheep. From these stories, lessons and methods for a church member visitation ministry will be identified.

The second part of the chapter will explore what Ellen White's writings say about visiting people who have fallen from grace and need someone to help them to come back. Her recommendations on the methods to use to reach these people will also be outlined.

Part I: Old Testament Review

Adam and Eve's Visit

The story of humanity begins when God Himself created the world and invited humans into a special relationship. The Lord God created the world in six days and the crown of his creation was humans, which in the Bible is defined as man and woman (Gen 1:27). God prepared everything for humanity. He created a perfect world for His creation to live in and enjoy. God gave them food, work, and a home to live in. When God placed Adam and Eve in their new home, the Garden of Eden, God gave them the warning:

Then the LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to tend and keep it. And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, "Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die." (Gen 2:15-17)

In this garden paradise life was perfect. Adam and Eve spoke to God face to face. They had daily communion with their Creator. In this primeval narrative of humanity, God told His new creatures about their role in creation, " 'Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth' " (Gen 1:28). He also tells them about what they are to eat, " 'See, I have given you every herb that yields seed which is on the face of all the earth, and every tree whose fruit yields seed; to you it shall be for food' " (Gen 1:29). It is at this point that a loving, concerned God spoke words of warning to Adam and Eve in their new, almost perfect home, a warning not to eat of the fruit of the forbidden tree. "Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die" (Gen 2:16-17). There was no room for misunderstanding the word of God.

God commanded Adam and Eve not to eat of that one tree in the middle of the garden. There is no question, Adam and Eve knew how serious this was because when Eve addressed the serpent, she said, "nor shall you touch it" (Gen 3:3). Not only did she understand they were not to eat the food, but believed they should not even touch it.

But the sad reality of this biblical account is that the first couple disobeyed God, distrusted Him, and ate the forbidden fruit—they sinned. The Hebrew word for sin does not appear in Gen 3, but as Baker and Alexander (2002) point out, the concept of sin is present:

Four major stories of sin dominate Genesis 1-11. The First is the account of Adam and Eve, who disobeyed God's command not to eat of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil in the garden (Gen 3). Though the story does not employ the usual word for "sin," the NT labels the action sinful: Rom 5:12 "Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned. (p. 764)

God had warned them that if they ate of the fruit of the tree, they would surely die. God could have come and immediately administered the punishment deserved—death. The Lord could have chosen to leave them alone and honor their choice and they would have died of old age with no hope of salvation. But that is not the God of the Bible:

The men have broken away from God, but God will not and cannot leave them alone. He comes to them as one man to another. . . . God conversed with the first man in a visible shape, as the Father and Instructor of His children. . . . This human mode of intercourse between man and God is not a mere figure of speech, but a reality. (Keil & Delitzsch, 1996, Vol. 1, p. 97)

The New Interpreter's Bible commenting on this passage says:

The Creator of the universe and all creatures, chooses not to relate to the world at a distance, but takes on human form, goes for a walk among the creatures, and personally engages them regarding recent events. The writer presents no naïve theology, but a deeply profound understanding of how God chooses to enter into the life of the world and relate to the creatures. Even more, this God comes to the man

and the woman subsequent to their sin; God does not leave them or walk elsewhere. (Keck, Fretheim, Brueggemann, & Kaiser, 1994, p. 362)

The very first account of God visiting fallen man is found in man's first home:

And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden. Then the LORD God called to Adam and said to him, "Where are you?" (Gen 3:8-9)

God visiting Adam and Eve right after they sinned is an example of grace and love. "God is depicted as a gentle father seeking out his own" (Matthews, 1996, p. 240).

The first couple was hiding from God because they saw they were naked and they were ashamed. This was so different from all the other visits from their Creator. In those, Adam and Eve had always been happy, excited participants. As Gunkel (1997) stated, "God strolled every day among humans in the primeval period, for his heart wished to see what he had created" (p. 18).

In the question, "where are you?" God's yearning for His creatures is evident: a love that is hard to comprehend or to imagine. Before the fall, Adam and Eve came out and welcome their Creator joyfully. Now they flee in terror (White, 1958, p. 57). The Bible account seems to indicate that the evening was the usual time when God came to visit them. Another commentary stated:

In the cool of the day—lit., the breeze of the day. Onkelos renders it *in the rest or silence of the day*—i.e., the evening, when in hot countries the cool breeze springs up. It seems to have been the usual time for paying such visits to his newly formed creatures. (Jamieson, Fausset, & Brown, 1945, Vol. 1, p. 54; italic original)

Here is God standing at the door of the Garden of Eden and knocking (as with the church of Laodicea), pleading with our first parents to let Him come in and restore that broken relationship. God could have chosen to speak from heaven with a sinister booming voice, but He chose a personal visit to Adam and Eve's home. "It was God their

creator, who now as God the redeemer was *seeking the lost*" (Wenham, 1987, p. 76; emphasis added).

That is what God has been doing ever since man fell into sin: seeking the lost. The purpose of His visit was to give promises of hope and redemption to His backslidden children. God came to offer forgiveness by covering their nakedness with lamb skins. Adam and Eve accepted God's grace, and their lives were changed. Genesis 3:21 says, "Also for Adam and his wife the LORD God made tunics of skin, and clothed them." God's visit to Adam and Eve was to restore and repair that broken bond. God took the initiative to come to their garden home and talk to them about their situation. And the result was that Adam and Eve made amends with God, the relationship was restored and they *came back to church*. The first couple became active servants of God and taught their children. Through them their sons, Cain and Able, learned to make an altar and sacrifice to God. Through them Seth learned to honor and to obey the God who came to visit Adam and Eve on that day in their first garden home.

Three Lessons on Visitation and Reclamation From the Adam and Eve Narrative

As one reflects on how God deals with people who have wandered away from Him, three lessons stand out. First, any visit to inactive members should be motivated by love. The primary motivation for a church visitation program to effectively reach inactive members must be love. If this kind of *agape* (unconditional) love is lacking, then it must be actively sought through prayer.

Second, when people fall and stop coming to church, they need to be visited right away. When months or years go by, they get cold and think that no one cares. God went immediately to see Adam and Eve. It is important to act quickly.

Third, when church members visit, they need to bring a solution to the inactive member problem. God gave Adam and Eve assurance of their restoration and clothed their nakedness. Church members need to ask the Holy Spirit to give them wisdom to perceive the need of inactive members and how best to meet it.

Noah's Visit

Another crucial visit God made to man is when the world was so wicked that God decided to annihilate man and animals from this planet:

Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And the LORD was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart. (Gen 6:5-6)

From the fall of Adam and Eve in Gen 3 to the description of the earth in Gen 6, things went downhill very quickly. Von Rad (2001) commented on the "the incursion and spread of sin" in this way, "The Jahwist's great hamartiology in Gen. III-XI about the way in which sin broke in and *spread like an avalanche* is undoubtedly something exceptional" (p. 154). This avalanche of sin spread so fast that God repented of making man and decided to go and visit Noah to tell him about His plans to destroy the earth:

This is the genealogy of Noah. Noah was a just man, perfect in his generations. *Noah walked with God*. And Noah begot three sons: Shem, Ham, and Japheth. The earth also was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence. So God looked upon the earth, and indeed it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted their way on the earth. (Gen 6:9-12; emphasis added)

The picture we have of the relationship Noah had with his Creator was of walking together. But on that day, when God and Noah were walking, visiting, and talking, God told Noah not only His plan to destroy the world, but also the way he could save humanity.

Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown (1945) note that the Hebrew expression "to walk

with God" (*hithalek- haa-'Elohiym*) indicates a visible reality, "The Divine Being still condescended to manifest Himself visibly to His people" (Vol. 1, p. 80).

Noah walked with God just like his great grandfather, Enoch, walked with God. God, in a personal visit, told Noah that He wanted to use him for the job of building the ark and to take part in saving humanity. He wanted to give man a second chance. That is exactly what grace is, having another chance at life. After all, salvation is only by grace. Ephesians 2:8-9 says, "For by grace you have been saved. . . . It is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast." Noah was just as deserving of death as the rest of humanity. Romans 3:23 says: "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." Genesis 6:8 says: "But Noah found grace in the eyes of the LORD." The fact that Noah "walked with God" and that he was "righteous" does not imply that Noah deserves to be spared or that he has earned God's grace. But God in his infinite mercy and love for humanity, through Noah, gave humanity another opportunity to live:

In God's grief there is abundant grace. Noah, alone among all the sons of Adam, "found favor [*hēn*, i.e., 'grace'; GK 2834] in the eyes of the Lord." Once again the narrative drives its point home with a play on Noah's name. The consonants of the word "grace" (*hn*) are a reversal of the consonants of the name "Noah" (*nh*). The purpose of v. 8 is to show that Noah found favor with God. (Sailhamer, 2009, p. 118)

The story of the flood is not about Noah's righteousness or the monumental feat of building the ark and going through the flood with all the animals inside the ark, but about God's abundant grief, and God's abundant grace. He wanted to give man a second chance. God wanted to reclaim some of His creatures and spend eternity with them:

We can all learn from Noah's refusal to conform to his world, but in the end we are not supposed to be impressed with Noah but with God. The text is in fact oddly silent about Noah on a number of serious counts; more to the point, Noah is silent—he never speaks through the whole Flood account. He has no response to God's announcement, no questions about the ark or the animals, no plea on behalf of anyone else, no cries for mercy, no bursts of joyful gratitude at the prospect of being saved, no grief for a world destroyed, no impatience in the ark, and no prayers of

thanksgiving accompanying sacrifice. The narrator leaves Noah a “flat” character. The only personality he has is found in the characteristics attributed to him by God. The text could not be clearer that Noah is a bit player and that the star of the account is God. Whatever we might learn from Noah is totally eclipsed by what we learn about God. So what is it that the text teaches us about God? (Walton, 2001, p. 332)

What the story of Noah and the Flood teaches about God is that He is a God who seeks the lost and wants to give sinners a second chance. He will do impossible things so humans can be saved. John Walton (2001), in his commentary on Genesis, also points out that the Flood account can be arranged in an extended chiasm referred to as *palistrophe*. In this type of literary structure, the first paragraph is parallel to the last paragraph of the story and the second is parallel to the second to last, until you have one single point standing alone in the center of this literary pyramid. When the story of the Flood is studied as a palistrophe, the center of the story is "God remembered Noah" (p. 316). Again, the common denominator in the Bible story is a God who loves man and wants to save him. God does not forget His people.

At the end of the flood, after the ark was opened, we see the animals leaving the ark and Noah sacrificing. We also see a rainbow in the sky, a reminder that God will never destroy the earth with water again. God made a promise to humanity that we do not have to be afraid of the future. The rainbow is a symbol of God's promises and that God wants to save us and not destroy us.

God's visit to Noah on that day gave this "preacher of righteousness" (2 Pet 2:5) a sense of purpose. Noah preached to the antediluvian world a way of salvation. God invited Noah to be part of a grandiose plan and build His kingdom upon the earth. And Noah responded to the task given him.

Three Lessons on Visitation and Reclamation From the Noah Narrative:

As one observes the story of the flood, it seems like the following lessons apply. First, people are more likely to come back to church when they get positive praise and encouragement. Just like God referred to Noah as righteous and perfect even though we know that Noah was not perfect, he had struggles like all of us; but God saw how Noah desired to walk with Him, and God rewarded him by saving Noah and his family. The visiting church member needs to say positive things about the people they visit, mention some of the past accomplishments, and work done for the church. Second, when church members are reminded of Bible prophecies they are more likely to go and warn the inactive members that there is a *flood* coming, and we all need to prepare for it. Third, visiting members need to tell inactive members about God's rainbow. They need to share Biblical promises with the inactive members in their homes, reading God's promises again, bring excitement to the heart. This will instill hope for the future and inspire them to be in heaven.

Moses' Visit

Now Moses was tending the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian. And he led the flock to the back of the desert, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. And the Angel of the LORD appeared to him in a flame of fire from the midst of a bush. So he looked, and behold, the bush was burning with fire, but the bush was not consumed. Then Moses said, "I will now turn aside and see this great sight, why the bush does not burn." So when the LORD saw that he turned aside to look, God called to him from the midst of the bush and said, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am." Then He said, "Do not draw near this place. Take your sandals off your feet, for the place where you stand is holy ground." (Exod 3:1-5)

In the story of Moses, one can find an inactive member of God's church. Moses knew that he was born for a special purpose and that God wanted him involved in delivering His people from the bondage of slavery. Moses fails by trying to do it his way

and flees from Egypt. After years of inactivity, he lost his vision and drive. Then, God paid Moses a visit and invited him to go back to Egypt and finish the job he started 40 years before, but not Moses' way, God's way. A Bible commentary makes a connection between Moses and Noah. The Hebrew word for "ark," *tēbâ*, occurs elsewhere only for Moses' basket of rushes (Exod 2:3-5). Thus, Moses becomes a new Noah (Keck, Fretheim, Brueggemann, & Kaiser, 1994, p. 391).

Moses becomes God's ambassador to the children of God. God fulfills the promise He made to Adam and Eve that He was going to send a redeemer (Gen 3:15). In Deuteronomistic theology it is crucial that the binding treaty that Yahweh makes with Adam and Eve is carried through (Fritz, 2003, p. 197). Therefore, Noah and Moses became God's human instrument to redeem or save His people and are part of the fulfillment of the *covenant* God made to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. Thus, they are a type of the Redeemer. They are God's chosen instrument to bring blessing to His people. However, the blessing flowed two ways. Not only do Noah and Moses bless God's chosen people by being obedient to the task that God gave them, but Noah and Moses are themselves blessed because they themselves find salvation (Sailhamer, 2009, p. 119).

Just like with Adam and Eve in the garden after the fall and Noah in the antediluvian world, God comes to Mount Horeb to speak to Moses. In his commentary on Exodus, Terence Fretheim (1991) calls this *the divine initiative* (p. 56). Moses was not seeking God. Moses was not praying or asking for the job. He was tending the sheep of his father-in-law many miles away from Egypt. He did not seem to be concerned about the suffering of God's people. A commentary on Exodus says:

Yahweh is well aware of what the situation is and he will soon do something about it. Israel is "my people." He has a special interest in their safety. He is, after all, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. His relationship with them has a long history. He has heard their cry and tells Moses that he has "come down to rescue them". To "come down" is typical biblical language to describe what God does when *he intervenes in human affairs*. (Enns, 2000, p. 99; emphasis added)

The God who rescued Noah in the ark is the God who rescued Moses in the little ark. Eighty years later, God pays Moses a visit at mount Horeb and calls him by name. "Moses, Moses!" (Exod 3:4 NAS). "One was in the bush, in the heat of the flames, who knew him, and addressed him by name. Who could this be but a Divine Being?" (Jamieson, Fausset, & Brown, 1945, p. 285).

The Bible says that the "angel of the Lord" appeared to Moses, but on closer examination we realize that this angel is Yahweh Himself because the attributes of the Godhead are applied to Him. First, this angel is called God, "God called to him from the midst of the bush" (Exod 3:4). Second, this angel is called "I AM":

He said, "Thus you shall say to the children of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you.'" Moreover God said to Moses, "Thus you shall say to the children of Israel: 'The LORD God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you.'" (Exod 3:14-15)

There is no doubt that God came to see Moses and not an angel (Stuart, 2006, p. 111; Clarke, 1938, p. 303).

This is God himself talking to Moses. "God was not distant, but very close" (Bruckner, 2008, p. 42). It is as if He is saying, "I visited Abraham when I made him count the stars. I visited Jacob when I wrestled with him at Peniel. Now I am visiting you." God comes to Moses in "a flame of fire" (Exod 3:2). The bush is not on fire, but God is the fire, a theophany of fire (appearance of God). God has used fire to represent Himself in many instances in the Bible. He appeared to Abraham as a burning torch (Gen 15:17). He led Israel through the wilderness as a pillar of fire (Exod 13:21). When

God gave the Ten Commandments, He looked "like a consuming fire" (Exod 24:17). God is not fire, but that is the way He chose to appear to humans in some instances (Stuart, 2006, p. 113). This proves that it was not a vision, or a dream, but the personal presence of God. It is God personally visiting Moses.

The question we need to ask ourselves is, why did God chose fire? Like Jonah, Moses is running away from God and wants no part in leading a revival. If visitation is intervening in human affairs, Moses was not too happy that God came to visit him that day in the wilderness and meddle in his affairs. He knew the job was not easy, and he tried to get out of it by giving many excuses. Therefore, God appeared to Moses in the form of fire in order to show Moses that He meant business. Even then, Moses gave all kinds of excuses because he was comfortable being inactive. But after God resolved every one of his excuses, Moses became one of the most active members in God's church.

We also need to note that God asked Moses to take his shoes off because the place was holy. The same command was given to Joshua, Moses' successor, when he was ready to enter into the promise land. He was asked to remove his shoes. In every instance, when God comes to talk to one of the leaders of His people, it is to give them a job. In the culture of the Ancient Near East, removing one's sandals was a sign of reverence to acknowledge the holiness of a place (Enns, 2000, p. 98). However, in addition to the place being holy due to God's presence, it also shows that the job Moses is about to receive is holy work (Dozeman, 2009, pp. 119-120). Being God's instrument for the salvation of His people is a holy calling. Once again, when God visits people, the inactive becomes active, and in turn, they bless others:

And the LORD said: "I have surely seen the oppression of My people who are in Egypt, and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters, for I know their

sorrows. *So I have come down* to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up from that land to a good and large land, to a land flowing with milk and honey. (Exod 3:7-8; emphasis added)

Commenting on the above expression "I have come down," Allen, Durham, and Honeycutt (1973) call it the "Great Condescension." God's great condescension is the reason that we are still alive (p. 313). Lam 3:22 says: "Through the LORD's mercies we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not."

But after the great condescension, comes the great commission. Three times the word "go" (*yalak*) appears when God speaks to Moses. "Go to Pharaoh" (Exod 3:10); "Go, gather the elders" (3:16); and "Now go, and I will be with you as you speak" (4:12; Dozeman, 2009, p. 119). Carol Meyers (2005, p. 55) in her commentary on Exodus points out that eight times Moses protests, gives excuses, and wants for God to send someone else to do the daunting challenge, but eight times God has an answer for him. The great commission cannot be avoided.

Once Moses stopped giving excuses and God's agenda became Moses' agenda, the first thing Moses did was to go and visit people who are discouraged and let them know that there is a God who cares and wants to bring them out of bondage. In the section of *Contemporary Significance*, a Bible commentary on Exodus brings this passage to our time:

When we turn to applying these narratives to our lives, we ask ourselves, "What does it mean for a Christian to be 'called' by God?"

This question can be addressed on two different levels: (1) God calls us as sinners into his kingdom; (2) having done so, God calls each of us to some kingdom service. In other words, God's call concerns salvation and vocation. Exodus 3:1-4:17 and other call narratives, as understood in their Christological dimension, speak to Christians today. (Enns, 2000, p. 120)

God calls not only to save the one He calls, but that the called may become a channel of blessing and save others. God wants to reach inactive members through us.

Inactivity does not mean that people stop believing in God. Many inactive members have lost their faith that God cares about their troubles and that He can work miracles and can still change lives. When we do the work of visiting people, like God did to Moses and, in turn, Moses to the children of Israel, the results could part a Red Sea.

**Three Lessons on Visitation and Reclamation
From the Moses Narrative:**

After reading the calling of Moses, one can see the following lessons. First, members should visit people no matter how long they have been inactive. In the case of Moses, he had been inactive for 40 years. If there are names on the church books of people who stopped coming to church many years ago, it should never be assumed that they will not come back. They need to be visited.

Second, church members should visit with the objective of eliminating excuses inactive members give for why they stopped coming to church. Like Moses who gave many excuses for not going back to Egypt and being part of God's redemptive plan, people give many reasons why they are no longer attending church. Visitors need to make an effort to remove those excuses and make it possible for them to start attending church again.

Third, church members visit inactive members because it is a holy work. To be God's instruments of salvation for inactive members is holy work. Visiting is not an easy work. Moses tried to avoid the job because he knew it was hard. The work of visiting former members is, in many ways, like Moses dealing with the children of Israel. Elders and deacons will have to hear many complaints and a lot of whining. But it is still a holy job with eternal results.

Elijah's Visit

Another interesting visit that God made personally is found in the story of Elijah. One of the main points in Elijah's account is that God's agenda when He visits people is to give them encouragement, restore their faith, and make them active members in building up His kingdom. That was true in the life of Moses, and it is especially true in the life of Elijah who, after a resounding victory for God, deserted God and ran for his life:

Then Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah, saying, "So let the gods do to me, and more also, if I do not make your life as the life of one of them by tomorrow about this time." And when he saw that, he arose and ran for his life, and went to Beersheba, which belongs to Judah, and left his servant there. But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a broom tree. And he prayed that he might die, and said, "It is enough! Now, LORD, take my life, for I am no better than my fathers!" (1 Kgs 19:2-4)

Most Bible students have a hard time dealing with Elijah's desertion. How can this man of powerful faith, who was able to bring down fire from heaven and consume an altar, who was able to resurrect a boy, be running away from Jezebel? This is how a theologian puts it describing the *superhero* characteristics of Elijah:

This applies especially to Elijah himself: he is unapproachable, unpredictable, feared, and even hated, but always someone to be reckoned with. The impression given, however differently, in all these stories is of a man of enormous powers. Such a figure cannot simply have been invented, and can only be explained by saying that the stories reflect a historical figure of well-nigh superhuman stature. (von Rad, 2001, pp. 14, 15)

But the Bible does not hide people's failures. The biblical account is straightforward and portrays Elijah as a quitter. He is a deserter; and in old times, soldiers who deserted had a death warrant. He knew that his life was on the line, and he was tired of kings and queens chasing him to kill him. He wanted out. The life of an inactive was far more comfortable. Elijah did not even want to live.

Alone in the desert, Elijah desires nothing other than death. "No better than my ancestors" (v.4) may recall Moses, who asks for death when the people grumble about their condition in the desert (Num. 11:15). As with Moses, Yahweh intervenes at the critical moment. The "angel of the Lord," the agent of divine presence, appears, as he did to Moses when he fled to Midian from the threats of Pharaoh in his journey toward Horeb (Ex. 3:2). (Konkel, 2006, p. 302)

Elijah was tired of babysitting people who were accustomed to a syncretistic religion. God's children faltered between two opinions, and Elijah thought he was the last true worshipper of Jehovah. He lost his sense of purpose and was very depressed. It should be pointed out that Elijah was tired, hungry, and thirsty. In that weakened condition, God visits Elijah and gives him food and water. God ministers to his human needs. Provan's (1997) commentary on First Kings says:

Thus far Elijah has been responding only to Jezebel's "messenger" (Hb. *mal'ak*, v.2); God has been excluded from the arithmetic. And he has been behaving somewhat like the anti-hero Jonah, traveling to a far-flung place without a divine travel permit (Jonah 1:1-3). Now, however, it is God's turn to take the initiative with a messenger of his own (Hb. *mal'ak*, vv. 5, 7; the NIV's angel). It is his first move in trying to lead Elijah, as he tried to lead Jonah, back on the path of faith from which he has strayed. (p. 114)

Elijah was provided for during the drought through the ravens and later in Zarephath by the widow. And Yahweh's special loving care for His prophet is stressed again (Fritz, 2003, p. 197). However, Elijah uses the energy gained from God's food and water to run even further away from the queen. But once again, God proves that He does not give up on his children. God delights in giving second chances. God chases after His people even into the middle of a desolate desert; even when they are in the "pit of fear and depression" (House, 1995, p. 224). God visits Elijah there in a cave. Matthew Henry's (1982) commentary on Elijah fleeing from Queen Jezebel says:

Wherever God's children are, as they are still upon their Father's ground, so they are still under their Father's eye and care. They may lose themselves in a wilderness, but God has not lost them; there they may look at him that lives and sees them, as Hagar [did], Gen 16:13. (Henry, 1982, Vol. II, p. 681)

God catches up to Elijah in a cave, 40 days and 40 nights from civilization:

"And there he went into a cave, and spent the night in that place; and behold, the word of the LORD came to him, and He said to him, 'What are you doing here, Elijah?'" (1 Kgs 19:9).

God is not there to shame him; to tell him, "You're fired!"; or to tell Elijah how bad an example he has been to His people. God went to visit Elijah in that cave to give courage to the despondent prophet. Matthew Henry's (1982) comment on this verse uses the key word:

The visit God paid to him there and the enquiry he made concerning him: *The word of the Lord came to him.* We cannot go any where [*sic*] to be out of the reach of God's eye, his arm, and his word. Whither can I flee from thy Spirit? Ps. Cxxxix.7 &c. God will take care of his out-casts; and those who, for his sake, are driven out from among men, he will find, and own, and gather with everlasting loving-kindnesses. (p. 682)

On the other hand, it is interesting that God did not choose to talk to Elijah by a strong wind that rent the mountain, or in an earthquake, or in the fire like He did with Moses. He chose the Adam and Eve method of "the cool of the day" (Gen 3:8). He appears to Elijah in a "still small voice" (1 Kgs 19:12); literally, "a sound of soft stillness". As Walter Brueggemann (2000) notes in his commentary: "The familiar KJV rendering, 'still small voice,' suggests a sound that is soft and intimate. More recent opinion suggests no voice, no sound, but an eerie silence laden with sense of holiness" (p. 233). For Elijah, who was all about fire, thunder, judgment, and highly stressful life on the run; this "still small voice" caught his full attention.

Once God has Elijah's attention, has removed his excuses, God calls Elijah to active service again. There, in the quietness of the cave, Elijah reached a turning point in his life. Yahweh recalls Elijah at the same mountain he recalled Moses for service

(Coote, 1981, p. 119).

Then the LORD said to him:

"Go, return on your way to the Wilderness of Damascus; and when you arrive, anoint Hazael as king over Syria. Also you shall anoint Jehu the son of Nimshi as king over Israel. And Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abel Meholah you shall anoint as prophet in your place" (1 Kgs 19:15-16)

Walter Brueggemann's (2000) commentary on these verses says:

The address to the prophet who is still licking his wounds is a massive imperative: "Go" (19:15). Go back to the conflict, go back to the trouble, go back to the risk. The mission given him is to enact three anointings: Hazael as king of Syria, Jehu as king of Israel, and Elisha as successor prophet (19:15-16). (p. 237)

In the story of Elijah, God is portrayed as a visiting God who is interested in restoring people who are discouraged, depressed, and spiritually down. The result is a person who becomes active for God, visiting others. Reclaiming souls to active duty is a powerful ministry.

Three Lessons on Visitation and Reclamation From the Elijah Narrative:

First, even the most committed Christians get discouraged. When people are spiritually low and they do not feel like going to church, members should visit them and encourage them. A spiritual cold can infect anyone, but visitation will speed up the process of healing.

Second, some people run even further when they are visited, but that should not stop members from visiting them again. Follow the leading of the Holy Spirit and visit them again and again, keeping the doors open.

Third, just as God chose to reach Moses through a fire and Elijah through a "still small voice," the visitor should pray that God will direct as to which approach is best to get people's attention and bring them back to church. Sometimes, it may be as simple as

asking the question, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" In other words, "What are you doing outside of the church? You have a job to do. You have a heaven to conquer and a hell to shun. God has called you to help others go to heaven too."

Part II. New Testament Review

Nicodemus' Visit

The most quoted text in the whole Bible is undoubtedly John 3:16, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." This verse is also probably the most memorized passage of scripture among Bible-believing Christians. There can be no soteriology without making a reference to this passage. However, these awesome words were given to an audience of one. God could have chosen to announce this message Himself from heaven at the crucifixion, the same way He spoke at the Jordan. Jesus could have chosen to present it during the Sermon on the Mount or when twenty thousand were listening. But he said these famous words to *one* person.

There was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. This man came to Jesus by night and said to Him, "Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him." Jesus answered and said to him, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." (John 3:1-3)

Nicodemus was a Jewish ruler. He belonged to the Sanhedrin, the Jewish equivalent of the Supreme Court, the highest ruling body of the Jews. He was one of the revered seventy (Borchert, 1996, p. 170). He was also "the teacher of Israel" (John 3:10), not a teacher but "the teacher". Evidently Nicodemus was a well-respected teacher of the law. He had a distinguished reputation in Jerusalem and led people in worship and Bible study (Burge, 2000, p. 113). That is probably why Nicodemus was ashamed to be seen

talking to Jesus in daylight, and instead chose to visit Him in the darkness of night. No, Jesus did not go to visit him. Nicodemus came to Jesus. But it was still in the context of a personal encounter or visit with Jesus, who is God, that some of the most precious truths of Christianity were revealed.

The Bible notes that Nicodemus came at night. Andreas J. Köstenberger notes that the word "night", in the gospel of John, refers to spiritual and moral darkness (2004, p. 120). So, Nicodemus comes to Jesus in spiritual darkness, but he stepped into the light to make inquiries (Burge 2000, p. 114).

One of the first inquiries he made was about who Jesus was. He came and called him Rabbi, an equal. Nicodemus was a Rabbi, and he calls Jesus Rabbi. Nicodemus is a teacher, and he calls Jesus a teacher. And then he says: "We know that You are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him" (John 3:2). In other words, Nicodemus was inquiring Jesus identity by asking: "Jesus, who are you?" Nicodemus is searching for the answer to the theological debate that was raging at the time: Was Jesus the Messiah or not?

Jesus does not even respond to this question but tells him: "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again [greek *anōthen*, meaning 'again' or 'above'], he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3). What Nicodemus needs is not more theology or a biblical discussion. What this man in darkness needs is the Light. He needs to be born 'again' or 'from above.' Even though Nicodemus was of the church, he had not experienced a new birth. Jesus was trying to explain spiritual things to Nicodemus, and this *teacher* was having a hard time understanding *heavenly things* (Martyn, 2003, p. 130). Jesus said to Nicodemus:

"Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.'" (John 3:5-7)

Nicodemus still did not understand what Christ was talking about. And so Christ speaks even plainer, telling him that what he needs only Christ on the cross can supply. He is still carnal. He is still of this world. He has been bitten by the serpent of sin and is destined to die. The only cure is to look to the cross. Thus, the same way God told the people of Israel in the wilderness to look at the snake to be healed of the poison from the serpents; God sent His Son to be crucified and heal Nicodemus from the deadly venom of sin. All Nicodemus has to do is look to the cross and believe that Christ's death can heal him from sin and give him eternal life:

And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. (John 3:14-17)

Jesus brings Nicodemus face to face with judgment here. He points back to the story of how the children of Israel sinned against God, and God sent serpents as a punishment. When people cry out to Moses, then God makes a way for people to have a choice. The choice to look up and believe or to look down at their wounds and not believe that there is healing. Jesus, also points forward to His death on the cross and says to Nicodemus that once again the story will be repeated. People will have a choice to look up to the cross, be healed, and have eternal life; or look down at themselves, try to find solutions to their sin problem on their own and die eternally. But Jesus did not tell Nicodemus this to scare him, but because He loved Nicodemus and he did not want him to perish. Jesus was warning Nicodemus, a *church going* member who was concerned

more about theological discussions than having a relationship with God. He was telling Nicodemus that even though he was a well-respected member of the clergy and a Bible teacher, (for the times, Nicodemus was one of the best *Christians* there were) if he did not change and be born again, he would be lost. And God does not want anyone to die:

Say to them: "As I live," says the Lord GOD, "I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn, turn from your evil ways! For why should you die, O house of Israel?" (Ezek 33:11)

The impact that Jesus made in the life of Nicodemus in that one nocturnal visit is due to the fact that Nicodemus came searching for something better and believed Jesus' words. This visit that Jesus had with Nicodemus was fruitful. The Bible mentions him again defending Jesus in John 7:50 and one last time in John 19:39 donating about one hundred pounds of myrrh and aloes to embalm Jesus' body. In his commentary on the Gospel of John, Craig S. Keener (2003) points out that the fact that Nicodemus was identified by name, and *not* just by saying he was a ruler of the Jews, like most of the characters in the gospel of John (e.g. the woman at the well, the nobleman from Capernaum, the man at the pool of Bethesda, etc.). The author wants to show that even though Nicodemus made no commitment that night, he did make a commitment later. This nighttime visit made a Bible reading man a truly converted supporter of God's work in the early church. Nicodemus became active in advancing God's kingdom (pp. 535-536). This is what the book *Desire of Ages* says:

After the Lord's ascension, when the disciples were scattered by persecution, Nicodemus came boldly to the front. He employed his wealth in sustaining the infant church that the Jews had expected to be blotted out at the death of Christ. In the time of peril he who had been so cautious and questioning was firm as a rock, encouraging the faith of the disciples, and furnishing means to carry forward the work of the gospel. He was scorned and persecuted by those who had paid him reverence in other days. He became poor in this world's goods; yet he faltered not in the faith *which had its beginning in that night conference with Jesus*. (White, 1940, p. 177; emphasis added)

Jesus was lifted up in the heart of Nicodemus. He was given a choice to accept eternal life or to perish. The same choice is given to the whole world. The same choice is given to "whosoever" believes (John 3:16). It is a universal invitation, not just to the Jews (Burge, 2000), not just to the ones who attend church regularly. Nicodemus believed and accepted the gift of eternal life.

The night conference that Nicodemus had with Jesus changed his life forever, even though it did not seem that way at the beginning. To all appearances, the visit was fruitless, but Ellen White (1940) said: "But Jesus was acquainted with the soil into which He cast the seed. The words spoken at night to one listener in the lonely mountain were not lost" (p. 176).

Three Lessons on Visitation and Reclamation From the Nicodemus Narrative:

First, members need to visit people to bring them out of darkness into the light. Darkness is a cold, scary place to be. Light is where people find warmth and communion with one another. People need to understand that staying out of church will bring a spiritual darkness into their lives. The main purpose of visiting people is to invite them to be part of the weekly worship service which is going to bring light and life into their lives.

Second, when church members visit inactive members, they need to lift up the cross of Jesus. Their visit is not a social visit to talk about the weather. They may need to start there, but sooner or later they need to introduce people to the crucified Savior and the healing he wants to bring into their lives.

Third, some of the best visits, or the most fruitful may be the ones the visitor thinks did not make any difference. There are searching hearts that need to talk to

someone to clarify an issue in their minds. Like Nicodemus, many inactive members believe in God, they still have faith in the Bible and Jesus, but they need to be born again. Just as that visit with Jesus changed Nicodemus' life forever, but the fruit of it was not seen for several years; the same may be true of many of the visits church members make to inactive members; results may not be seen for many years, but the seed cast will eventually bear fruit.

The Samaritan Woman's Visit

If there is a story in the Bible that encapsulates the personal visitation ministry of God toward backslidden humanity it is in the story of Jesus meeting the Samaritan woman at the well of Jacob (John 4).

Picture a Samaritan woman walking under the noonday sun toward Jacob's well. She not only had an empty jar but an empty heart. She was disillusioned with life. She had read the Old Testament scriptures. She knew about doctrine. She seemed to know right and wrong because she was a child of God. This woman of Sychar believed in the coming of the Messiah. But on that day, the farthest thing from her mind was to have a visit from Him. The story begins by saying: "He left Judea and departed again to Galilee. But He needed to go through Samaria" (John 4:3-4). This "need" was according to the plan and will of God. It was a divine appointment that Jesus foreknew (Köstenberger, 2004, p.146).

The Samaritan woman chose to go at noon time, when people were not at the well. She was disappointed that there was a man at the well. Men had caused nothing but trouble and pain in her life. She was going to try to avoid this man and get out of there as soon as she could. But Jesus had an agenda. He sent all of the disciples to town,

so He could be alone to meet and minister to this poor, thirsty woman (John 4).

A woman of Samaria came to draw water. Jesus said to her, "Give Me a drink." For His disciples had gone away into the city to buy food. Then the woman of Samaria said to Him, "How is it that You, being a Jew, ask a drink from me, a Samaritan woman?" For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans. Jesus answered and said to her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, 'Give Me a drink,' you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water" (John 4:7-10).

The woman at the well could have ignored Jesus, that Jewish man, but she was hungry for conversation and social interaction. She was unhappy with her life and longed for something better, something she did not have. Writing on the Samaritan woman, Ellen White (1940) says:

He who seeks to quench his thirst at the fountains of this world will drink only to thirst again. Everywhere men are unsatisfied. They long for something to supply the need of the soul. Only One can meet that want. The need of the world, "The Desire of all nations," is Christ. The divine grace which He alone can impart, is as living water, purifying, refreshing, and invigorating the soul. (p. 187)

Visiting and talking to people was Jesus' passion. His main agenda was to teach people the truths of God's kingdom. Jesus visited the Samaritan woman by Jacob's well on that hot noon day to offer her of the living water. This spiritual water, if she chose to drink of it, would assuage her spiritual thirst:

Jesus answered and said to her, "Whoever drinks of this water will thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life." The woman said to Him, "Sir, give me this water, that I may not thirst, nor come here to draw." Jesus said to her, "Go, call your husband, and come here."

The woman answered and said, "I have no husband." Jesus said to her, "You have well said, 'I have no husband,' for you have had five husbands, and the one whom you now have is not your husband; in that you spoke truly." (John 4:13-18)

The water that Jesus was offering the Samaritan woman was no ordinary water.

She understood this well. Jesus was offering her something that would cause her to never thirst again, and it would *spring up* or *leap* into *eternal life* inside of her. This was the meaning in her life she had been longing for. This was the source of happiness she had been looking for in all the wrong places. When she heard this she said: "Sir, give me this water" (John 4:15). Once Jesus had created in her a desire for something better, He had to bring up her sin because He wanted her to deal with it. Jesus says: "bring your husband"(John 4:16).

Most commentators affirm that the woman at the well had an immoral past. Keener (2003) implies that more than just trying to mislead Jesus, the Samaritan woman was "embarrassed to talk about a shameful past" (p. 605). If she was ever going to be born again like Nicodemus, she had to bring her sinful past to the foot of the cross. The Samaritan woman could not drink the water Jesus was offering her without making some changes in her life.

The Samaritan woman not only had to make some moral changes in her life, but also had to make some theological changes:

The woman said to Him, "Sir, I perceive that You are a prophet. Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, and you Jews say that in Jerusalem is the place where one ought to worship." Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe Me, the hour is coming when you will neither on this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, worship the Father. You worship what you do not know; we know what we worship, for salvation is of the Jews. But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth." (John 4:19-24)

The Samaritan woman was the opposite of Nicodemus. Nicodemus had the truth but not the Spirit. He knew the law, but not the Lawgiver. The woman at the well had the passion. She was waiting for the Messiah to come, unlike Nicodemus and most Pharisees. But she did not have her theology straight. She thought the place of worship

mattered. Neither the mountain in Samaria nor the temple in Jerusalem was important to God. Jesus emphasized that God is more interested in people who worship with their minds and their hearts. God is interested in people who not only to have the right theology, but the right spirit; to believe and to feel. The place is secondary. It can be at someone's house, like at the house of Cornelius, and still receive the Holy Spirit (Acts 10:44). One can worship by the river like Lydia and accept Jesus and be baptized (Acts 16:14,15). One can worship in a nice sanctuary, but what is most important is that people love and worship God with all their heart, with all their soul, and with all their mind (Matt 22:37).

After reading the story of the Samaritan woman and the offer Jesus made to her, the biggest question is: Did she drink of the water of life and what was the result? George R. Beasley-Murray (1999) wrote: "We are intended to understand that she 'drank' the water. And that her fellow townsmen did as well" (p. 65).

The woman said to Him, "I know that Messiah is coming" (who is called Christ). "When He comes, He will tell us all things." Jesus said to her, "I who speak to you am He." And at this point His disciples came, and they marveled that He talked with a woman; yet no one said, "What do You seek?" or, "Why are You talking with her?" The woman then left her waterpot, went her way into the city, and said to the men, "Come, see a Man who told me all things that I ever did. Could this be the Christ?" Then they went out of the city and came to Him. (John 4:25-30)

The Samaritan woman not only drank of the water herself and found the Messiah, but she offered the water to others and introduced them to Jesus. The people of Sychar came to meet Jesus and were *harvested*:

Do you not say, "There are still four months and then comes the harvest"? Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and look at the fields, for they are already white for harvest!... And many of the Samaritans of that city believed in Him because of the word of the woman who testified, "He told me all that I ever did." So when the Samaritans had come to Him, they urged Him to stay with them; and He stayed there two days. And many more believed because of His own word. (John 4:35, 39-41)

Jesus knew that His visit was not only going to make a difference to the Samaritan woman, but to many others who would believe in Jesus through her word. There is power in visiting just one person. Because one satisfied *customer* can bring many others. The Samaritan woman brought a whole town to the feet of Jesus. Ellen White (1940) concludes chapter 19 "At Jacob's Well" of *Desire of Ages* with these words:

This woman represents the working of a practical faith in Christ. Every true disciple is born into the kingdom of God as a missionary. He who drinks of the living water becomes a fountain of life. The receiver becomes a giver. The grace of Christ in the soul is like a spring in the desert, welling up to refresh all, and making those who are ready to perish eager to drink of the water of life. (p. 195)

Three Lessons on Visitation and Reclamation From the Samaritan Woman Narrative:

First, one needs to offer living water to people who have been marginalized by the community of believers. They may have had a moral fall or they may be from another culture, but the desire of the church community should be to get them to drink of the fresh water of the Word.

Second, talk about past failures not to shame them but to redeem them. There may be times that it is appropriate to bring up the past, but only to bring healing and a cure.

Third, invite them to be part of the weekly church services; to come to worship God in spirit and in truth. If the church is too far, or the person is unable, their home can be place of worship.

Peter's Visit

The story of Simon Peter is a categorical example of God working in the life of people who once were active and involved in church life but discouragement and

despondency set in and they went back to their former way of life, not being involved in church any more.

Simon Peter was called by Jesus to do the work of ministry. He worked with Jesus Christ for three and a half years. He was very involved in *church*, working side by side with Jesus and his other fellow members of God's church. But after Peter forsook his Master and denied that he knew the Lord because of his fear that he may be killed along with Jesus, Peter was downhearted and dejected and decided to go back to his former job, fishing for fish. One can almost hear the words of Elijah resounding in Peter's mind: "I am no better than my fathers!" (1 Kgs 19:4).

The biblical account of how Jesus went to the lake of Tiberias to visit Peter and invite him to come back into active service is a representation of how God deals gently with inactives. Let us review the narrative. The Bible says that Peter told the other apostles: "I am going fishing" and his friends of three and a half years said: "we are going with you also" (John 21:3). They went fishing all night and they did not catch anything. In the morning, they saw *Someone* standing on the shore and they did not know it was Jesus. But this stranger told them to cast their net on the right side of the boat, and they did so, and their net got so full of fish they were not able to bring the fish into the boat. It was at this point that the apostle John recognized their Lord. Peter was so excited to hear it was Jesus that he plunged into the water to meet Him. When Peter arrived on shore, Jesus is waiting with a fire with cooked fish and bread. He gave them the food He prepared for them, and as they were eating they were looking at Jesus in silence because they knew He had been crucified. The apostles were certain that Jesus died on the cross on the day of the last Passover and that He was buried in a new grave with Roman soldiers guarding

the grave on the same Friday. The Bible is clear that this was the third time Jesus showed Himself to His disciples since came out of the tomb (John 21:1-14).

All the events taking place in John 21 must have felt like *déjà vu* for Peter. The account of the recall is very similar to the first call of Peter in the synoptic gospel of Luke (Luke 5:1-11): the fishing all night, and not catching anything; the order from Jesus to throw the net into the water and catching a great multitude of fish; the fact that another boat had to come to help bring the catch to shore; Peter going to meet Jesus—the first time by kneeling down and the second by plunging into the lake; and the call to work with people (fish=lambs). The Lukan account finishes by saying that Peter forsook everything and followed Him (Luke 5:11). The Johannine account finishes by Jesus invitation "follow Me" (John 21:19). And Peter's response to Jesus' invitation is the same as at the beginning. He left everything again and *this time* he never went back to fishing.

The story of the recall of Peter in John 21 has the flavor of the Great Commission. Jesus tells Peter: "feed my sheep" (John 21:17). Bring My lambs to tender grass; give them food. That is the whole point of the Great Commission. In Matt 28, Mark 16, and Luke 24, Jesus' last words to His disciples were to preach the gospel to all nations. Preaching is feeding the world with God's Word. Jesus was about to leave earth to go back to heaven. He wanted to leave a group of leaders to continue ministering to His church.

Peter was an inactive member. After denying Jesus three times, he felt like a total failure. The Bible says he went back to fishing and others followed him. If it had not been for Jesus visiting Peter, in order to reclaim him, he would have gone back to his former way of life:

So when they had eaten breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me more than these?"

He said to Him, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You."

He said to him, "Feed My lambs."

He said to him again a second time, "Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me?"

He said to Him, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You."

He said to him, "Tend My sheep."

He said to him the third time, "Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me?" Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, "Do you love Me?"

And he said to Him, "Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You."

Jesus said to him, "Feed My sheep. Most assuredly, I say to you, when you were younger, you girded yourself and walked where you wished; but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will gird you and carry you where you do not wish." This He spoke, signifying by what death he would glorify God. And when He had spoken this, He said to him, "Follow Me." (John 21:15-19)

The Synoptics finish their gospel narratives with the Great Commission to go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. But none of the first three gospels have the words "follow me" at the end like John does. The Gospel of John wants to point out that after Jesus' crucifixion, the disciples were very discouraged and despondent. They forgot all about preaching the gospel and ministering to people. Even after they heard from Mary Magdalene that Jesus was alive, even though they heard from Cleopas and the other disciple about Jesus talking to them on the road to Emmaus. Also, while these two disciples were telling the apostles about how Jesus disappeared in front of them, Jesus appeared to them right there and then, in the upper room while they were behind closed doors for the fear of the Jews. John 21:14 says: "This is now the *third time* Jesus showed Himself to His disciples after He was raised from the dead" (emphasis added). And in spite of all these epiphanies (where Jesus shows himself to his followers), Peter goes back to his former job: fishing. But Jesus, the Great-Condensing-God, went to the lake to recall Peter. Roger Fredrikson (1985) makes this point very clear by saying:

But there is still unfinished business. Jesus now draws Peter aside to deal with him personally. This is a searching time of healing and restoration. The "*backslider*" is not only welcomed home, but commissioned by the great Shepherd to care for His sheep. The mission is not only to evangelize, to catch fish, but to disciple, to feed the sheep. (p. 295; emphasis added)

Jesus calls Peter back into active duty. He will no longer be an inactive member but a very involved member of the new community of believers. Jesus goes to the lake on that morning to make the call once again "follow Me". A commentator says that the center of gravity of chapter 21 is in the expression "Follow Me". Why? Because that is the whole reason Jesus goes to the Sea of Tiberias on that day. Jesus went for the specific purpose of reactivating Peter. And the way He accomplished this was by doing three things. First, Jesus brings to memory the miraculous fishing when Peter was first called (Luke 5:1-11; Sloyan, 1988, p. 228). Second, Jesus has "a fire of coals" (John 21:9) on the lake shore, a reminder of the fire where Peter denied Jesus (Michaels, 1989, p. 354; Lincoln, 2005, p. 512). And third, by asking him three times: "Do you love me?" Three times Peter had denied Jesus. Three times Jesus asked Peter, do you love me (MacDonald, 1990, p. 387).

Besides the point that it was very humbling for Peter when Jesus asked, "Do you love me?" Jesus wanted to let Peter know that he forgave him and called him to finish what he started or as Jesus put it, to go back to shepherding. Some commentators say that in the question "Do you love me more than these?" *These* refers to the other disciples. But the context of the story was fishing, therefore the question Jesus was asking was: "Do you love me more than you love fishing?" Roger Fredrikson (1985) says in his commentary of John:

The question that Jesus addresses to Simon Peter- and the seriousness of the encounter is underlined by Jesus' use of Peter's full name- is not concerned with impulsive action, however courageous, but with Peter's heart, "*Do you love Me more*

than these?" This is the most important question. Does Peter love Jesus unselfishly and unconditionally more than he cares for fishing with all of its trappings, or anything else? Peter's immediate response is affirmative, "*Yes, Lord; You know that I love You*" (v. 15). He makes no reference to any other claims on his love. But words are not enough, for there is a mission. Converts are to be cared for. The lambs are to be fed. (p. 295)

Another commentator underlines the importance of this question by saying:

His question is extremely searching, indeed, it is the ultimate question in life: *do you truly love me more than these?* (v. 15). What does *these* refer to? If it is the net and boat, then this question gets at the central point of discipleship and reveals a person's heart. What do we love the most? Have we abandoned all to follow Jesus? Every time we are faced with a temptation this question is raised. Every time we become preoccupied with even the good things God gives us this question is raised. (Whitacre, 1999, p. 494)

The Bible says in Luke 5 that Peter forsook everything and accepted the call of Jesus who said: "from now on you will catch men" (Luke 5:10). But as we can see, Peter went back to fishing. Peter wanted to be *a fisherman*; but God had called him to be "a fisher of men" (Mark 1:17). Jesus is going back to reclaim His worker.

Does Jesus succeed in recalling Peter? Talking to the Elders of the early church, Peter says:

Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock; and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away. (1 Pet 5:2-4)

Jesus' visit to Peter at the Sea of Tiberias was well worth His while. An inactive member became a champion in God's cause.

Three Lessons on Visitation and Reclamation From the Peter Narrative:

First, do not let people who stopped coming to church go back to the world, to their former way of life. Like Peter who after a disappointment went back to fishing, many inactive members stopped attending church because the world called them back.

After disappointments in the church, the call of the world became very strong. Like a rip tide, the world will suck people back into it before they realize it. They will return to their former ways and vocation. But God's reclamation program, through the members of the church, should be stronger and more forceful.

Second, people are longing to belong and an invitation to eat is an invitation to belong. Just like Jesus had a meal prepared for Peter before he called him to feed his lambs (John 21:9-13), people can often be reached best through the fellowship around the family table; through the breaking of bread together. This may be one of the most effective ways to bring them back.

Third, one needs to realize that even though people are not coming to church, it does not mean they stopped loving God. When people are confronted with the unflinching question about their love for God, many will wake up and discover where their loyalty and their heart truly are. Many of these inactive members will realize that even though they stopped coming to church, it does not mean they stopped loving God. Indeed they have longings and feelings for the Christ who died for them on the cross.

Part III. Ellen White and the Ministry of Visitation and Reclamation

The Work of Ministry by Church Members

It is critical to understand first and foremost that Ellen White (1911) teaches that ministry is not just for ordained ministers. The local elder and deacon should also be involved in ministry.

It is fatal mistake to suppose that the work of soul-saving depends alone upon the ministry. The humble, consecrated believer upon whom the Master of the vineyard places a burden for souls is to be given encouragement by the men upon whom the Lord has laid larger responsibilities. Those who stand as leaders in the church of God are to realize that the Savior's commission is given to all who believe in His name.

God will send forth into His vineyard many who have not been dedicated to the ministry by the laying on of hands. Hundreds, yea, thousands, who have heard the message of salvation are still idlers in the market place, when they might be engaged in some line of active service. To these Christ is saying, "Why stand ye here all the day idle?" and He adds, "Go ye also into the vineyard." Matthew 20:6, 7. Why is it that many more do not respond to the call? Is it because they think themselves excused in that they do not stand in the pulpit? Let them understand that there is a large work to be done outside the pulpit by thousands of consecrated lay members. (pp. 110-111).

This quote makes it very plain that one can be in the ministry without being a paid minister. A local church leader can be a priest, they can shepherd the flock without having to be paid. Ellen White uses several phrases to describe what these believers can be doing for God. She uses "saving souls," "engaged in some line of active service," "large work to be done outside the pulpit."

Visitation is more Productive than Preaching

A careful study of Ellen White's writings shows that the ministry Ellen White is talking about is a visitation ministry at its core. The work of saving souls is done largely outside of the pulpit. Ministry does not primarily take place at the 11 a.m. worship service on Sabbath morning. The larger work of ministry takes place during the week in people's homes:

A minister is one who ministers. If you confine your work to sermonizing, the flock of God will suffer; for they need personal effort. Let your discourses be short. Long sermons wear out both you and the people. If ministers would make their sermons only half as long, they would do more good and would have strength left for personal work. Visit families, pray with them, converse with them, search the Scriptures with them, and you will do them good. Give them evidence that you seek their prosperity, and want them to be healthy Christians. (White, 1946, p. 348)

Many times more emphasis is placed on preaching evangelistic sermons than visiting people. Millions of dollars are spent in preaching evangelistic meetings, but we do not place a proper emphasis on the work that is more effective; the work of visiting

discouraged people in their homes. This is what Ellen White (1995) says:

This is home missionary work,—work that God's ministers are to strive faithfully to do. They are not only to preach; they are to minister by going from house to house, becoming acquainted with the different families in the church, some of whom may be converted, while others are still without God and without hope in the world. It is possible to preach many sermons without accomplishing the work essential for the well-being of the people of God. The discourses given are to be followed with personal labor. A work may be done by visiting people in their homes, and speaking helpful, encouraging words to them, which will be far more effective than the work done by preaching. (p. 229)

Elders and Deacons Doing the Work of Visitation

Ellen White is very clear and direct in pointing out that personal visitation is far more effective in the salvation of souls than the work done by preaching. However, some may still think that this is the work of paid pastors, that effective visitation can only be done by paid clergy, but this is what Ellen White (1995) would answer:

From the time that converts come together in church capacity, they should be educated to take up such lines of work as will not only benefit their own souls, but the souls of others. "The liberal soul shall be made fat: and he that watereth shall be watered also himself." The Lord has given to His followers talents of intellect and energy and means. Those who are known to be men of well-balanced minds, who have the love and fear of God before them, should be appointed as elders and deacons; and through the exercise of the ability God has given them, they may grow ... The church may be visited only occasionally by a minister, and yet be a growing church; for Jesus is our minister, and we are never to think that we are left alone. (p. 226)

Again she says:

When God's elders and deacons grasp this concept of visitation, it will revolutionize the way church is conducted. The work of visitation is a holy work that pastors and lay people should do. This kind of work is what Jesus did when He was on earth.

The mission of Christ was to heal the sick, encourage the hopeless, bind up the brokenhearted. This work of restoration is to be carried on among the needy, suffering ones of humanity. God calls not only for your benevolence, but your cheerful countenance, your hopeful words, the grasp of your hand. Relieve some of God's afflicted ones. Some are sick, and hope has departed. Bring back the sunlight to them. There are souls who have lost their courage; speak to them, pray for them. There are those who need the bread of life. Read to them from the Word of God.

There is a soul sickness no balm can reach, no medicine heal. Pray for these, and bring them to Jesus Christ. And in all your work, Christ will be present to make impressions upon human hearts. (White, 1952, p. 71)

Women Elders and Deaconesses Doing the Work of Visitation

Ellen White not only says that this work is to be done by pastors, elders, and deacons, but also by women elders and deaconesses because she talks about laying the hands on them:

Women who are willing to consecrate some of their time to the service of the Lord should be appointed to visit the sick, look after the young, and minister to the necessities of the poor. They should be set apart to this work by prayer and laying on of hands. In some cases they will need to counsel with the church officers or the minister; but if they are devoted women, maintaining a vital connection with God, they will be a power for good in the church. This is another means of strengthening and building up the church. We need to branch out more in our methods of labor. Not a hand should be bound, not a soul discouraged, not a voice should be hushed; let every individual labor, privately or publicly, to help forward this grand work. Place the burdens upon men and women of the church, that they may grow by reason of the exercise, and thus become effective agents in the hand of the Lord for the enlightenment of those who sit in darkness. (White, 1995, p. 224)

The Work of Visitation Will Help the Church Member

By placing "the burdens upon men and women of the church," (White, 1995, p. 224) not the conference or the union, not only will more people be reached for Christ, but these church members' spiritual lives will grow and be strengthened as they become active in ministering to others. Just like a baby that learns how to walk first and then to run, through practice, members will mature spiritually as they are actively visiting people. The best way for people to grow in their faith is by helping others less mature than themselves.

Nothing will give greater spiritual strength and a greater increase of earnestness and depth of feeling than visiting and ministering to the sick and the desponding, helping them to see the light and to fasten their faith upon Jesus. (White, 1948, Vol. 4, pp. 75-76)

According to Ellen White, "*Nothing will give more spiritual strength than to visit the sick and the desponding*" (White, 1948, Vol. 4, pp. 75-76; emphasis added). The definition of desponding sounds a lot like what Elijah was suffering when fleeing from Jezebel. Merriam-Webster defines despondent as: "feeling or showing extreme discouragement, dejection, or depression. Desperate, hopeless, having lost all or nearly all hope. Despondent implies a deep dejection arising from a conviction of the uselessness of further effort" (Despondent, n.d.). When Elijah was depressed and lost hope, God went to visit him. He fed him and told Elijah that he was not alone. Elijah got new spiritual strength and continued doing God's work until he was taken to heaven by a chariot of fire. That is the job of the visitor: to help the desponding see the light and fasten their faith on Jesus again. Ellen White (1995) confirms this:

Our ministers may visit our churches, and may offer public prayer to God for the comfort of the sorrowing, asking Him to dispel doubt from their minds, and shed light into their darkened hearts. But this will not be so effective in helping these sorrowful, doubting, sin-burdened ones, as to lead them to work for those more needy than themselves. The darkness will be dispelled if they can be led to help others. (p. 231)

The work in behalf of the needy can only take place outside of the worship service:

Ministry does not consist alone in preaching. Those minister who relieve the sick and suffering, helping the needy, speaking words of comfort to the desponding and those of little faith. Nigh and afar off, souls are weighed down by a sense of guilt. It is not hardship, toil, or poverty that lowers and degrades humanity. It is guilt, wrong-doing. This brings unrest and dissatisfaction. Jesus would have His children minister to sin-sick souls. Those that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak until they become strong. (White, 1995, p. 231)

When help is given to souls who are weak, there are greater blessings. The woman at the well was visited by Jesus and the result was that she brought others to the Messiah. Moses' recall was a blessing to God's people. Elijah's depression was lifted because Jesus, as Yahweh, came to see the man of God. These inactive members were

changed by a visit. All of God's people were once away from God and He rescued us:

Those who labor in word and doctrine should break their own hard, proud, unbelieving hearts, if they would witness the same in their brethren. Christ has done all for us because we were helpless, bound in chains of darkness, sin, and despair, and because we could do nothing for ourselves. It is through the exercise of faith, hope, and love that we come nearer and nearer to the standard of perfect holiness. Our brethren feel the same pitying need of help that we have felt. We should not burden them with unnecessary censure, but let the love of Christ constrain us to be very compassionate and tender, that we can weep over the erring and *those who have backslidden from God*. The soul is of infinite value. (White, 1948, Vol. 3, pp. 187-188; emphasis added)

Talking about the work for those who have backslidden from God, she says in another quote:

They need the tenderest sympathy and the most judicious help; they should be carefully instructed; and should be prayed for and prayed with, watched and guarded with the kindest solicitude. Those who have fallen under temptation and have backslidden from God need help. This class is represented in the lessons of Christ by the lost sheep. The shepherd left the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and hunted for the one lost sheep until he found it; he then returned with rejoicing, bearing it on his shoulder. (White, 1948, Vol. 4, pp. 263-264)

Pastors Working Together With Church Members to Do Visitation

One of the primary responsibilities of pastors is to visit the flock and do less sermonizing. Ellen White (1946) makes it very clear that ministers should visit. Talking about pastors she says:

This part of the pastoral work is not to be neglected or shifted upon your wives or some other person. You must educate and train yourselves to visit every family that you can possibly get access to. The results of this work will testify that it is the most profitable work a gospel minister can do. (p. 440)

In fact, Ellen White (1948) not only states that the most profitable work a minister can do is to visit, but she even warns pastors who neglect this duty of visiting inactive members that they do so at the peril of their souls:

Some ministers who profess to be called of God have the blood of souls on their garments. They are surrounded with backsliders and sinners, and yet feel no burden for their souls; they manifest an indifference in regard to their salvation.... Unfaithful ministers, what a retribution awaits you! (Vol. 2, p. 506)

Pastors should visit the inactive members. It is very easy to justify not going after the sheep who have gone astray. After all, they had their chance, why give them a second chance? Pastors often feel that they need to concentrate on new believers who have not heard the Advent message. But as shepherds, they need to visit the former members not only because they are part of the fold, but because God will hold the minister responsible for the loss of their souls.

Visiting inactive members will also make the pastor a better preacher and soul winner. When clergy are visiting pastors, they will be more effective ministers and their influence will permeate the whole church. Their example will be motivational and the congregation will do the same work of visitation. But again, this is a work that pastors should not do alone. It is too big for the pastor alone. Members need to be involved in visitation:

The Lord requires that far greater personal effort shall be put forth by the members of our churches. . . . Our ordained ministers must do what they can, but it must not be expected that one man can do the work of all. The Master has appointed unto every man his work. There are visits to be made, there is praying to be done, there is sympathy to be imparted; and the piety—the heart and hand—of the whole church is to be employed if the work is to be accomplished. (White, 1946, p. 113)

Visitation Work Is Hard Work

Take note that "*greater personal effort* should be done by *the members*" (White, 1946, p. 113; emphasis added). Personal visitation was the best method God used to reach man. It is still the best method that humans, clergy or church members, can use to

reach their fellowman. It is not an easy work. The task is most often avoided by elders and deacons, but this is what Ellen White (1948) says to all Christians:

Nothing will give greater spiritual strength and a greater increase of earnestness and depth of feeling than visiting and ministering to the sick and the desponding, helping them to see the light and to fasten their faith upon Jesus. *There are disagreeable duties that somebody must do* or souls will be left to perish. Christians will find a blessing in doing these duties, *however unpleasant they may be*. Christ took the disagreeable task upon Himself of coming from the abode of purity and unsurpassed glory, to dwell, a man among men, in a world seared and blackened by crime, violence, and iniquity. He did this to save souls; and shall the objects of such amazing love and unparalleled condescension excuse their lives of selfish ease? shall they choose their own pleasure, follow their own inclinations, and leave souls to perish in darkness because they will meet with disappointment and rebuffs if they labor to save them? Christ paid an infinite price for man's redemption, and shall he say: My Lord, I will not labor in Thy vineyard; I pray Thee have me excused"? (Vol. 4, p. 75; emphasis added)

If preachers were completely honest, they would confess that they would rather be preparing a sermon to preach the following Sabbath than doing visitation. Most pastors prefer the glamour of preaching or giving a seminar from the pulpit to 200 people and shaking people's hands at the end of service, than going to visit one single person at their home. It seems like a waste of time. It should be more effective to preach to a crowd of 5,000 than talk to a lonely woman at a well. But do not forget that the best followers God had are the ones who received a personal visit from Him. I would venture to say that discipling can only be done through a personal visit. True discipling cannot be accomplished in a worship service. It takes place in a private, intimate, face to face conversation, where people have a chance to ask questions and talk about their troubles.

Pastors should not feel that it is solely the job of the professionals to do visitation. Ellen White (1948) is very clear that ministers should not think that this is their job only:

The work of God in this earth can never be finished until the men and women comprising our church membership rally to the work and unite their efforts with those of ministers and church officers. . . . It is training, education, that is needed. Those

who labor in visiting the churches should give the brethren and sisters instruction in practical methods of doing missionary work. (Vol. 9, p. 117)

"Doing missionary work" is an expression that has been repeated time and time again in our churches. Ever since I can remember, the *Lay Ministries Leader* in the church talked about missionary work during the 10 minutes before the worship service, and the emphasis was to go knocking on doors and leave a piece of literature. I have done a lot of knocking on doors and distributed many magazines and handbills in my lifetime. However, according to Ellen White, what is the work for us to do? What is the greatest missionary work that we can do?

Our work is incomplete if we do not educate others to be laborers together with God, *visiting and praying with families*, showing to the world what Jesus has done for us. God's Word declares, "Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world." These words are spoken to every follower of Christ. Not only the minister, but every soul connected with Him, is to be a worker in His vineyard. "Herein is My Father glorified," Christ said, "that ye bear much fruit." By His own life Christ has paid for your earnest, hearty cooperation. If you do not work as faithful missionaries, you are untrue to your trust, and you disappoint your Saviour. (White, 1995, p. 226; emphasis added)

One has not done missionary work if all one does is place a handbill on the door handle of a home. One needs to be inside the house praying with them and telling people what the Lord has done in one's life. And the easiest homes to get into and minister to are not the homes of total strangers, but the homes of former members who are no longer coming to church.

Three Lessons on Visitation and Reclamation From Ellen White's Writings

First, the work of visiting the despondent, the inactive members, and the ones who are spiritually sick is not an easy job, but it must be done. It is easier to go to a board meeting, to go to a potluck, or to go to a work bee, (activities outside of church service

time) than to go do visitation to those who stopped coming to church. The work for the inactive members it may be disagreeable and unpleasant, but Jesus has been doing this work all from the beginning. He had to contend with Adam and Eve, Moses, Elijah, Jonah, Peter, Paul, and many others who were running away from Him. It is an unpleasant work, but it is very rewarding.

Second, this job is not just for the pastor but it is for everyone. Ellen White very clearly teaches that the work of visitation is too big for pastors to do alone. They need the help of church members who have a burden for souls.

Third, this work is not only good for the one visited, but for the visitor also. When the members visit people who are weaker than themselves, they are doing themselves a great favor. Their level of maturity will increase and their Christian experience will be solidified when they are actively visiting people in their homes. It is just like people who spend time cleaning graffiti from city walls. They are much less likely to engage in putting graffiti anywhere. Members who visit inactive members will be less likely to be inactive themselves.

Conclusion

In Conclusion, a careful investigation of the Bible and the writings of Ellen White demonstrate that since the beginning of time, God has been patiently looking for His wayward children. Running away from God is a chronic problem of humanity since the fall. We all have left God's fold at one time or another. The prophet Isaiah puts it this way: "All we like sheep have gone astray" (Isa 53:6). But God has called His children to comeback: "Return, you backsliding children, and I will heal your backslidings" (Jer 3:22). God is seeking man to return to Him, since He has the balm to heal us. He invites

us to look to the serpent that was lifted up in the wilderness, to Jesus on the cross, and live. Prophet after prophet preached about the main problem of man, backsliding. "My people are bent on backsliding from Me. Though they call to the Most High, none at all exalt Him" (Hos 11:7). But God has the balm of Gilead (Jer 8:22). God has the living water (John 4:10). He has the cure for our sin: "I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely, for My anger has turned away from him" (Hos 14:4).

The overarching motif in all the Bible stories is God coming to seek for people who are running away from Him. Many of these people were sheep of His fold who knew God, but left "the church". The Bible tells the story of a God of second chances. God came to visit them. God visited Adam and Eve. God visited Noah. God visited Moses. God visited Elijah. These were personal visits that were crucial in the plan to save humanity. If it had not been for God taking the initiative, there would have never been a Redeemer. In the New Testament, when Christ the Redeemer came, what did He do? He went to make personal visits. God visited Nicodemus. Then He went to Jacob's well to visit the Samaritan woman. He went to the sea of Tiberias to visit Peter. In all these instances, His concern was to get them back into action. These were God's backslidden children who were reclaimed, who came back to church, so to speak.

Ellen White tells us that there is a large work to be done, but most of the time we think the large work is evangelizing the unbeliever. Yet she repeatedly talks about former members: "Hunt up the backsliders, those who once knew what religion was, and give them the message of mercy" (White, 1951, p. 533). In another quote Ellen White says: "If there is a backslider, the shepherd knows how to present the truth in such a manner that the soul will be convicted. He will leave the ninety and nine, and seek the

lost sheep" (White, 1893, p. 18). She also emphasizes that this is not a job for the pastor alone but for everybody:

Every true follower of Christ will love souls for whom Christ died. He will leave his pleasant fireside, and the case of the wandering and lost sheep will engage his attention. The lost sheep never returns to the fold unless he is sought for and brought back. (White, 1897)

God has been doing the job of reclaiming people, of changing and transforming their lives. God wants to use His people in the same occupation of searching for souls who are running away from Him. God's agenda should be our agenda. Going to visit inactive members to make them active again in building God's kingdom should be top priority for all who wish to be co-laborers with God.

CHAPTER III
LITERATURE REVIEW ON VISITATION
AND RECLAMATION

Recent literature on visitation and reclamation addresses three critical questions that impact an effective visitation program. First, who is responsible for seeking the inactive members? Second, why reach out to inactive members? Third, how does one develop an effective visitation program in the local church? The answer to the first question explores the important role church members play in doing visitation as opposed to leaving the pastor to do the brunt of the work. The answer to the second question will explore the reasons for visiting. The answer to the third question is a visitation program developed for use by individual churches that make visitation a blessing to both the visitor and the person being visited.

Who is responsible for seeking the inactive member?

It is interesting to note how the concept of pastoral responsibilities in visitation has changed over the last century. In nineteenth century literature the pastor was given the main responsibility of visiting the congregation. In a book written in the nineteenth century on the qualifications and duties of the pastor, H. Harvey (1879) dedicates a whole section to visitation as the duty of the pastor (pp. 78-94). There is no mention, in the entire section, of the pastor training leaders to do the work of visitation. By the mid-1950s, church members are encouraged to do part of the work, but the pastor is still

mainly responsible for visitation.

Visitation is a major task of the church; therefore the church is obligated to give direction and supervision to the work. Who is responsible for such direction? Some larger churches are fortunate enough to have staff members for this task, but the majority of churches will have to depend upon the pastor to direct the work. Actually, the task belongs to the pastor as the under-shepherd of God (Sisemore, 1954, pp. 21, 22).

Sisemore also uses the example of church pastor Robert G. Lee in a congregation in Memphis, Tennessee, who made a total of 36,500 personal visits in a 10-year period. That is an average of 10 visits per day for 10 years. Essentially, he uses this to prove that no pastor has an excuse not to do visitation. If Pastor Lee, with a busy ministry, can do it, every pastor should be able to do it (Sisemore, 1954, p. 22).

However, by the late 20th century, with the rise in mega-churches and the ever-expanding responsibilities of pastors—like hospital visitation, sermon preparation, baptisms, weddings, baby dedications, counseling, etc.—the postmodern minister has come to realize that the work is too great for him or her to do alone. This realization has sparked a new interest in following the biblical model of ministry as described by Paul: "And He Himself gave some *to be* apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ" (Eph 4:11-12). When properly understood, this passage makes the pastor the trainer or equipper of the saints for the work of ministry. The saints, then, are to do the work of ministry, not the pastor, according to Paul. This is the comment Halverson (1994), chaplain to the United States Senate, makes on this passage:

Paul states this explicitly in the fourth chapter of his letter to the Ephesians. Every one of us has a sacred vocation, or calling, he says. Each of us has been

prepared for this sacred vocation by a measure of grace. . . . "The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers." In other words, he gave leaders to the church. But these leaders were not to be the church's primary ministers. To the contrary, they had a specific assignment: "to equip the saints" – that is, the lay people – "for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ" (Ephesians 4:11,12, NRSV). Clearly, in the apostle Paul's understanding, the work of ministry is the responsibility of the people of God. (p. 127)

Everyone is a Minister

According to Halverson, everyone is a minister. Traditionally, the word minister has been understood to mean professional paid clergy. However, the meaning of the word *minister* is *to serve*. For example, Paul says: "Tychicus, a beloved brother, faithful minister, and fellow servant in the Lord, will tell you all the news about me" (Col 4:7). The two words in this verse equated here are *minister* and *servant*. The latter is the Greek word *sundoulos*, a fellow slave, a servant. The former is the word *diakonos*. The definition given by the Theological Dictionary of the New Testament (Kittel & Friedrich, 1985, p. 152, 182) of *diakonos* is someone who runs errands; an attendant; a waiter at a meal (at table or in other menial duties); especially, a Christian teacher and pastor. Most Bibles translate *diakonos* as 'deacon,' 'minister,' or 'servant.' In other words, minister is not a term that specifically denotes paid clergy. It simply means a servant, or someone who serves the people.

If we are true to this definition, then indeed everyone who is called to serve others becomes a minister, *diakonos*, and a servant, *sundoulos*. As a matter of fact, Jesus explained this concept of all Christians being servants by the way He connected two parables at the end of his eschatological sermon in Matthew 25:14-46. In the first parable, the Lord gives talents to three *servants* (Mat 25:14-30). And He holds each *servant* accountable for the use of talents. Usually the parable of the talents is understood

to mean either the use of money or special talents like singing. But the parable that immediately follows it (Mat 25: 31-46), the parable of the sheep and the goats, shows that the talents Jesus is talking about are specifically given to serve others. The good servants, the sheep, provided for the needs of people and they visited people when they were at a low point in their lives. The wicked servants, the goats, did not use their talents and they disregarded not only the physical needs of people but also their emotional needs. We understand this parable to apply to all Christians in all ages. Serving others is the missionary work of all Jesus' followers. This is the mission Jesus gave to His followers. On this issue of being a servant, a Bible commentator wrote:

"The Lord does not simply call us to save us. He also calls us to be active servants in his kingdom, to be the salt of the earth to bring every thought captive under the universal rule of the risen Christ. We are all called in order to be sent out on a mission." (Enns, 2000, p. 122)

The emphasis of most Christian writers speaking on the subject is on the word "all". Werning (1983) in his book *Vision and strategy for church growth* says:

The greatest disservice we can do to inactive Christians is to let them drift away from Christ, unaware of the spiritual sickness taking place in their lives. It is God's will for all sincere Christians that they should be their brothers' keeper in matters of faith and life. Only a heartless person would sit and watch a drowning man without trying to save him. How much worse it is to sit idly by and watch a soul sink slowly because of his disregard of the Savior. (p. 67)

The Duty of Every Sincere Christian

In his book *Man to man: Ten sermons on visitation evangelism*, Archibald (1956) says in one of his sermons: "Regardless of social or educational standing, every Christian is summoned to this job of fishing. No man is too big to undertake it. No man is so inconspicuous that his talents are useless" (p. 14). By "fishing" he means going and knocking on doors, visiting people in their homes.

Therefore, according to Werning (1983) and Archibald (1956), the assignment of doing visitation with inactive members is to "all sincere Christians" and for "every Christian." No one has too little education or has too much education. No one is too rich or too poor that they can just sit and watch someone drown and miss heaven.

In the chapter "training lay persons for visitation," Lyle (1984) quotes, in his book *Building Relationships Through Pastoral Visitation*, the following:

Why should church people be trained for home visits? As important as home visits are, hospital and crisis home visits take precedence in pastoral ministry. But lay people can be trained to make friendly visits to the homes of other church members, bringing the skill of listening and the gift of concern. This kind of lay ministry frees the pastor to visit where the need is greatest. (p. 55)

Repeatedly, in current literature, the job of doing visitation is laid on the shoulders of the church members. The job once considered to be only for *professionals* now includes unpaid church members in the task. Hybels (2004) speaking about the Pentecost experience when *everybody* had a tongue of fire on their head, says: "From that moment on, instead of a few, selected priests filled and empowered by the Holy Spirit to act as go-between with God, suddenly every one of Jesus' followers became a priest" (p. 60).

In the book *How to Boost Your Church Attendance*, Hyles (1974) dedicates two chapters to showing how visitation is an important element in boosting church attendance. Hyles says that pastors should encourage church members to do visitation by "making visitation seem like the most important thing in the church." If the pastor magnifies the job of visiting, people will see visitation as the most important job in the church instead of collecting the offering as a deacon or giving the prayer as an elder on Sabbath morning (p. 16).

The Duty of the Deacon

As a matter of fact, one of the forgotten duties of elders and deacons in many churches is the responsibility of visiting church members in their homes. According to the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists' *Church Manual* (2000), one of the duties of the deacons is the visitation of members: "In many churches, visitation is arranged by distributing membership by districts and assigning a deacon to each district with the expectation that he will visit each home at least once a quarter" (p. 55). Once a quarter! That means that every member, active or inactive, would be visited four times a year.

The Duty of the Elder

The work of the elders is also delineated in the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists' *Church Manual* (2000):

In a case where the conference/mission/field committee assigns an ordained minister to labor as a pastor of a church, he should be considered as the ranking officer, and the local elder(s) as his assistant(s). The pastoral work of the church should be shared by both. The elder(s) should, in counsel with the minister, assist in the pastoral responsibility, which includes visiting the church members, ministering to the sick, arranging or leading out in anointing services and child dedications, and encouraging those who are disheartened. Too much emphasis cannot be placed on this part of an elder's work, who as an undershepherd should exercise a constant vigilance over the flock. (pp. 51-52)

The previous quote makes several important points about the scope of the local elder's duties: (a) the elder is an assistant pastor; (b) the pastoral work of the church should be shared by both pastor and elder; (c) the elder should assist in the pastoral responsibility of visiting church members; (d) the elder encourages those who are disheartened; and, last, (e) the elder is an undershepherd who is in constant vigilance over the flock. These are the responsibilities of the elder.

The Duty of the Deaconess

In fact, the duty of visiting members, according to the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists' *Church Manual* (200), is not only for deacons, elders but also for deaconesses: "Deaconesses are to do their part in caring for the sick, the needy, and the unfortunate, cooperating with the deacons in this work" (p. 56).

All contemporary literature on the subject of church growth and reaching the inactive members, point to the fact that in a united effort, pastors and church members, should be involved in a ministry that will encourage church attendance. "The great commission is a joint effort. . . . We all have a part to play," says Laurie (1999) in his book *The Upside-Down Church* (p. 64).

As we discussed in previous pages, pastors and elders, deacons and deaconesses, men and women have the responsibility to set aside their own comfort and the coziness of meeting with only close friends. The watching of the flock and doing the work of ministry toward inactive members is not the job of the pastors only.

Let it be clear that not everybody has the gift of visitation, or the gift for the ministry of going, as some professionals have called it. Some people will be impressed by the Holy Spirit to go knocking on doors and the same Spirit will enable them to do a good job. It will be discussed later in this chapter that there are a set of skills that are required to make the ministry of visitation an effective ministry.

Some members will exercise their God given gift of listening and visiting people face to face. Some other members have the gift of writing a card or letter. Some members have the gift of prayer and faith. All of these gifts can be used by the Holy Spirit to reach out to those inactive members and bring them back into the fold.

Why Reach Out to Inactive Members?

To Close the Back Door

Current literature devotes a considerable amount of space to the epidemic of declining church attendance. Gill (2003), in his book *The 'Empty' Church Revisited*, statistically shows the decline in church attendance in many denominations. Also, in his monumental work: *The American Church in Crisis: Groundbreaking Research Based on a National Database of Over 200,000 Churches*, Olson (2008) gives statistics on the percentage of members attending different churches (Pentecostal, Catholic, Reformed, Baptist, etc.) from every state in America from 2000-2005. Sadly, most church denominations in Olson's research show a decline in church attendance in *most* of the states. One of the main reasons, then, to do visitation of inactive members is to stop this decline.

Most authors credit this decline in membership to members leaving through the *back door*. This concept of the *front door* and the back door of a church can have an analogy with a business. When people come in the front door of a business, the employees make a concerted effort to welcome them, assist them, and make sure their needs are met. However, once they have been inside for a while, the attention dissipates and the person can often leave through the back door without anyone noticing because no one is posted to watch the back door or do anything special for those who use it.

It is obvious how this concept applies to a church. Members are on high alert to meet people, welcome them, and make sure their needs are met when the church is doing any kind of outreach activity. The focus is on meeting the people and welcoming them whenever there are evangelistic meetings at the church, when people are baptized, when there is a visitors' Sabbath, or at a Christmas program. These are happy and high events

in the life of the church. Outreach activities are where most of the resources and energies of a church are concentrated. These are front door activities.

However, once people have been brought through the front door by outreach activities, it is assumed their needs are satisfied and little attention is given to them. They begin to get spiritually cold, stop coming to church, and no one goes to see them to invite them back. Thus they have quietly left through the back door, unobserved and unattended, because the active members are posted at the front door to welcome newcomers.

There are many reasons why members stop coming to church. One of the reasons may be that people simply get too busy. Some other times, family/home responsibilities or problems prevent attendance. Another reason may be that members moved too far from church or their work situation prevent them from attending church. It is hard to pinpoint and/or narrow down the exact reasons, but current literature confirms that when there is lack of accountability at the back door it is easier for members to leave. And many times those who stopped coming to church feel that nobody cares if they attend church or not, since they were not visited and told they are missed.

Many church growth experts have been pointing to the back door as the culprit in declining church attendance. However, most church ministries are not paying attention. This is what Christian writers Francis and Richter (2007) say in their book *Gone for Good? Church-Leaving and Returning in the Twenty-First Century*:

Some claim that it is a matter of trying to 'shut the stable door after the horse has bolted.' . . . Others claim that energy exerted in studying church-leavers is misdirected: is it not more important to find out what attracts individuals to the church-going in the first place? Perhaps churches are better off without those who have left: if the uncommitted have defected, then this should leave a more committed core. However, many churches . . . have witnessed substantial decline in even their

committed core. Those who are newly attracted through the 'front door' have not made up for those lost through death and through the 'back door.' (p. 2)

Unfortunately, most of a church's efforts, budget, training, and resources go to the front door and the back door is neglected. An effective ongoing visitation program in the local churches may be a key element in closing the back door. This is what Wilson (1992) says on this concept of the back door:

In the exercise of appropriate discipline in the family of faith, there are those occasions when the back door needs to be opened wide and some folk "invited" to exit. Occasionally, not often. Never as a first response and only as a last resort. A healthy church has a back door but its hinges are rusty from infrequent use. (p.120)

We usually see outreach as the solution to the problem of church growth. But working with inactive church members can make our church grow also. In his book, *Assimilating New Members*, Schaller (1978) discusses church growth principles. In chapter 6, "Looking at the Inactive Members," he asserts that a regular program in the church to call on the inactive members can bring growth to the church (pp. 115-124). The same author, Schaller (1988), in another book, *Forty-Four Ways to Increase Church Attendance*, made this assertion: "The most effective single approach to increase church attendance" is to visit people at home (p. 38). Even though he meant visit all members, the inactive members are included. A different author says: "A former United Methodist Pastor, John (Tim) Savage, insists that a high percentage of our inactives are reclaimable, many with *one visit*" (Zunkel, 1982, p. 66; emphasis added).

Would a visitation program to reclaim inactive members close the backdoor and boost church attendance? It would certainly decrease the number of members exiting through the back door. By default, if fewer members are leaving, attendance should increase. However, the job of spotting inactive members and going to visit them should not be left to the pastor alone. Growth can be stifled when the pastor is the only one

doing the visitation. This is what Harre (1984), in his book *Close the Back Door*, says on the issue:

Finally, pastors who found new congregations and who maintain control over them will discover that such congregations will grow only as large as the number of members the pastor is able to serve effectively. Thus, if a given pastor can only effectively serve 250 members, the congregation will remain at 250 members. As new ones are gained, older ones drop out. The congregation's system and ministry style of the pastor can accommodate only 250 members. (p. 38)

When the pastor gets a group of church members to do the work of visiting the inactive members, in a sense he or she raises the walls of the dam to be able to hold more water. The pastor needs to use church members as door keepers at the back of the church, or he or she may see them leave through the back door themselves. This is what Duin (2008) says in her book *Quitting Church: Why the Faithful are Fleeing and What to do About It*. "People on the sidelines become bored, . . . to keep such people, you have to release them into ministry. . . . If you do not, they will leave anyway for an organization outside your church" (p. 174). When church members are utilized to do the work of visitation, we are not only closing the back door for inactive members, but also for bored members.

In reaching out to others, members receive a blessing themselves. Buttry (1988) in his book *Bringing Your Church Back to Life*, says: "Churches as well as individuals who sacrifice themselves, who serve others in love, will receive the rich fullness of God's blessings" (p. 77). This blessing comes to the individual who is serving others. The proverb of the wise man comes true when the church member stands at the back door of the church and helps keep people from leaving. "The generous soul will be made rich, and he who waters will also be watered himself" (Prov 11:25).

When a saint is involved in doing visitation, it will not only close the back door,

but he or she will mature. Lawrence (1999) in his book *Effective Pastoring*, says: "In equipping saints for the work of ministry, we help make them ready to minister to each other so that believers enter into maturity" (p. 71).

Ferguson (1998), in his book *The Great Commandment Principle*, talking about the importance of building relationships in the church, says this:

In addition to encouraging an intimate love relationship with God, Great Commandment ministry exists to encourage the God-ordained love relationship among people. . . . Therefore, equipping individuals to develop and maintain love relationships should be a fundamental priority in ministry. (p. 235)

Member visitation can be an important element of church growth. Church ministry can only limp along when members do not nurture themselves. One should have a balance of outreach and nurture. The balance is tipped to the side of outreach in many churches. In the second chapter, entitled "Pastoral and Lay Visitation," in his book, *Twelve Keys to an Effective Church*, Callahan (1983) places the right balance between outreach and nurture:

The key to visitation is "to have one foot in the community and one foot in the church." That is, whenever the focus of visitation is within the church, one of the major sources of outreach in the community is lost. Whenever the visitation is primarily in the community, the strength of sharing and caring with those who are participants in the life and mission of the congregation is lost. (p. 11)

Billy Graham came to realize the importance of an effective visitation program in the local churches following his evangelistic meetings. "It is only through a plan such as this that the fruits of the large, inclusive meeting may be conserved for the churches" (Archibald, 1956, p. 5). People who come into the church through the front door will be conserved if we have an efficient visitation program. And this visitation program will provide pastoral care for the inactive and the active members. In Larson, Anderson, and Self's (1990) book, *Mastering Pastoral Care*, there is a chapter dealing with "Letting the

Laity Pastor," this is what he says:

The real measure of a church is the number of people in ministry, and central to pastoral care is putting people in ministry and supporting them in their ministries. . . . That's getting back to basics. That's effective pastoral care. (p. 35)

Does a church member visitation program help in closing the back door? In the book, *Essential Church? Reclaiming a Generation of Dropouts*, there are a number of "post-it-notes" with essential sayings. One of them says essentially this: Churches that are intentional about reclaiming inactive young adults are seeing significant numbers of these young adults returning to church (Rainer & Rainer, 2008, p.225). When people intentionally work for the inactive members, young or old, those inactives respond. In the same book, the authors say that there is a myth that most people leave because they are angry at someone in the church. However, that is not the case. Most of the time, it is apathy. And "the dechurched often just need a gentle nod to become re-churched again" (Rainer & Rainer, 2008, p. 224).

To Create Fellowship.

The word for fellowship in the New Testament is *koinonia*. This word means partnership, participation, social intercourse, benefaction, etc. It carries the meaning of togetherness. The Bible tells us about the life of the early church and how they viewed church not as a one day, Sabbath morning worship service, but as a fellowship:

Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them. And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers. Then fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need. So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved. (Acts 2:41-47)

There are several things that should be taken note of concerning *koinonia* in the early church. One is that it extended beyond Sabbath, because it was done every day. Second, *koinonia* extended beyond the temple because it specifically mentions that they were visiting peoples' homes. Acts 5:42 says: "And daily in the temple, and in every house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus *as* the Christ."

For the most part, ministry in the early church was taking place in people's homes. The Bible says that Peter went to the house of Cornelius, preached to this centurion of the Italian Regiment and his family, and his whole house was baptized the same day (Acts 10:48). Paul and Silas went into the house of the Philippian jailer and opened the Bible to him and his whole house and they were all baptized the same day (Acts 16:25). Paul entered into the house of Justus and fellowshiped with him (Acts 18:7). Paul, talking about his ministry, says: "How I kept back nothing that was helpful, but proclaimed it to you, and taught you publicly and from house to house, testifying to Jews, and also to Greeks, repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ" (Acts 20:20-21). Paul was very active in visiting people in their homes.

The effectiveness of the gospel was due in large part to *koinonia*. Furthermore, the apostles were simply following Jesus example of visiting homes. The New Testament shows that Jesus often visited people in their homes. For example, Jesus visited the house of Simon the leper (Matt 26:6). He visited the house of Simon and Andrew and healed Peter's mother-in-law (Mark 1:29-31). He came to the house of the ruler of the synagogue and resurrected his twelve year-old daughter (Mark 5:37-42).

There are several examples of Jesus going into members' homes to heal, comfort, teach, and bring a blessing to the people. But one of the best examples of Jesus visiting a

home and the impact it had on the person being visited is found in the story of a short man on top of a sycamore tree:

And when Jesus came to the place, He looked up and saw him, and said to him, "Zacchaeus, make haste and come down, for today I must stay at your house." So he made haste and came down, and received Him joyfully. But when they saw it, they all complained, saying, "He has gone to be a guest with a man who is a sinner." Then Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, "Look, Lord, I give half of my goods to the poor; and if I have taken anything from anyone by false accusation, I restore fourfold." And Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because he also is a son of Abraham; for the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost." (Luke 19:5-10)

When everybody in the *church* would not dare to visit Zacchaeus, Jesus went to this publican's house and brought salvation into that home. Jesus ate at the home of tax collectors, prostitutes, lepers, and sinners. Jesus looked beyond what people were and entered their homes to fellowship with them and to tend to their spiritual health. That is what visitation does. That is what *koinonia* accomplishes. Myers (2007), in his book *Organic Community: Creating a Place Where People Naturally Connect*, says:

It would do us well to remember that our job is to help people with their lives rather than build infrastructures that help institutions stay alive. Sometimes we focus so much on building a "healthy church" that we forget to tend to the health of people. (p. 70)

"Task or Community?" is the title of one of the chapters of the book *The Leadership Jump*, by Long (2009), in which he discusses the importance of building community. According to Jimmy Long, the old generation was a task oriented generation. They wanted to build up the institution. The new generation is a community oriented generation. They want to build up the community. The old leaders were about the job, the new, younger leaders are about relationships (p. 104).

A study of the gospels reveals that Jesus was more interested in community than the task. The new generation wants to create a church like the church that Jesus created

with his disciples (Long, 2009, p. 104). They ate together, walked together, and spent time together. As a result, they bonded with each other. This is what a visitation program will do for a church. Very little community can be accomplished on Sabbath morning during the worship service when most of our members are present. People want to experience more community and deeper fellowship and that can only be accomplished by visiting people in their homes. A pastor writing on the issue of *koinonia* says this:

Many believers today disregard Christian fellowship, especially in the church. If everyone did that, there wouldn't be any church. I think it's significant that the Bible doesn't compare Christians to solitary animals like bears. Throughout Scripture God refers to us as sheep. And sheep are only safe when they're in the fold along with the rest of the flock.

So God made us to enjoy fellowship with one another! As the old adage puts it, "Joy shared is double joy. Sorrow shared is half a sorrow." (Carter, 1986, p. 26)

Barna (2005), in his book *Revolution*, enumerates the seven passions of revolutionaries. For him, revolutionaries are people who do not want to play religious games anymore, people who expect more from God and more from the churches they belong to, people who want to make an impact in other people's lives. Two of the passions of revolutionaries deal directly with a visitation program. One of those passions is that a revolution will not take place in the church unless we have intentional faith-based conversations (pp. 22-25). These intentional faith-based conversations cannot take place during the worship service, are slightly more possible during Sabbath School lesson study time, but can definitely occur during a home visit. A visit to an inactive member should not be about the weather, or about social conversation on the latest gossip. Visiting an inactive member is opening the door to have a conversation on faith, God, the narrow path, heaven, and the spiritual walk of the inactive member.

Another passion of revolutionaries is spiritual friendships. Talking about the early church and the fellowship they had, Barna (2005) says:

The church was all about relationships. These friends of Jesus became friends with each other and reveled in their mutual admiration of Christ in their frequent get-togethers. The friendships they formed provided not only encouragement but also loving accountability for spiritual integrity. (p. 24)

Consequently, church members who visit inactive members will revolutionize the church by developing spiritual friendships outside the four walls of the sanctuary.

Visitation for the sake of visitation or for the sake of providing statistics so elders or deacons can say they have fulfilled their duty would not be effective. Visitation should build relationships and friendships. Drane (2001), in his book *The McDonaldization of the Church: Consumer Culture and the Church's Future*, dedicates the last chapter to dreaming about the church of the future. For Drane, community is central to the church's future. People want to be accepted in a group. They want to belong to a community where they are loved (p. 186). Visitation without friendship will not be effectual.

Visitation should not be a program to be accomplished in a few months or a year and forget about it. It is not about meeting a quota of visits or a task that we finish and we can shake the dust off our shoes, but about building relationships. Malphurs (2004), in his book *Building Leaders*, talks about the difference between a house and a home. A house is the structure. A home is the people in it. When we talk about church, we are not talking about the building, but the people in it (p. 211). In chapter 13, "Turning a House Into a Home," he talks about the need to turn a church building from an institution into a fellowship and a community of believers. Visitation in the homes will assist that change (Malphurs, 2004).

Jesus built community by eating and spending time with his followers. The early church grew by breaking bread and fellowshiping at each other's homes. Bill Hull

(1997), in his book *Seven Steps to Transform Your Church*, talks of how investing time with people is what transforms them (p. 67). If we are going to develop community in our churches, we need to invest time— time to fellowship beyond Sabbath morning.

How Does One Develop an Effective Visitation Program in the Local Church?

Current literature covers two areas on the subject of a visitation program in the local church. Number one, what happens before church members make phone calls to secure appointments? Number two, what happens during the visit to make it effective?

Preparation Before the Visit

There are three elements that need to be in place before inactive members are contacted: Prayer, training, and a system of accountability.

Prayer

A visitation program to reclaim inactive members is only worth doing when it is accompanied with prayer. There is no single element that will bring more success to a visitation program than prayer. Jesus' effectiveness in reaching out to “the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Matthew 15:24) was due in large part to His prayer life. Matthew 14:23 says: "And when He had sent the multitudes away, He went up on the mountain by Himself to pray. Now when evening came, He was alone there." Luke 5:16 says: "So He Himself often withdrew into the wilderness and prayed." Again in Luke 6:12, it says: "Now it came to pass in those days that He went out to the mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God." These and other verses show how prayer was crucial to the fruitful ministry of Jesus.

Amazingly enough, most of the literature on reclaiming inactive members says

very little about prayer as foundational to success. It may be that most of the writers who deal with the issue of inactive members coming back to church take for granted that it will be accompanied with prayer. Hadaway (1990), in his book *What Can We Do About Church Dropouts?* does not even mention prayer as part of the solution. Jones (1988), in his book *Reclaiming Inactive Church Members*, has one single paragraph in his entire book that has the subsequent quote:

Before you do go to work on reclaiming these inactive members, pray. You are about to enter into God's work in the lives of these persons. It is only as a result of His work that they will ever be truly active again. For some of these members, you will have to wait upon the Spirit of God before you will have a real opportunity to minister to them. Look at each name and ask God to give you a loving spirit for each one. Until you can come to see these people as hurting, needful persons, you are not ready to minister to them. (pp. 90-91)

Prayer was the method employed by Jesus. Prayer was used by the disciples in the early church. And even if it is understood and taken for granted by most contemporary Christian writers on the subject of visiting inactive members, prayer is still foundational to people sitting in the pews.

The story of a quiet, zealous, 46-year-old businessman in New York City named Jeremiah Lamphier and the prayer ministry he started in his local church on September 23, 1957, illustrates the power prayer has to bring people back to church. Lamphier, a church member, began a noon prayer meeting at his Dutch Reformed Church. It made such an impact on the local community that his church became so full they had to turn people away. This is what Duewel (1995), in his book *Revival Fire* (as cited in Duewel, n.d.), says about the story:

Within one month pastors who had attended the noon prayer meetings in Fulton Street started morning prayer meetings in their own churches. Soon the places where the meetings were held were overcrowded. Men and women, young and old of all denominations met and prayed together without distinctions. The meetings abounded with love for Christ, love for fellow Christians, love for prayer, and love of

witnessing. Those in attendance felt an awesome sense of God's presence. They prayed *for* specific people, expected answers, and obtained answers. (para. 4)

Prayer is foundational to a church members visitation program. If there is prayer, there is power. If there is no prayer, it will be boring and a drudgery. We need to remember that the reclamation of inactive members is the work of the Holy Ghost. We could not bring one single soul back into the church if it was not for the presence of the Holy Spirit acting in peoples' lives. Inactive members need to hear the voice of God calling them back and not our own, and that is what prayer will accomplish. It is recommended that the visitors begin to pray for specific names of people who they are going to be visiting, expecting God to answer their prayers.

Training

Preparing for the visit is as important as the visit itself. Most current literature speaks of training the church members to do this job. Haugk (1992), in his book *Reopening the Back Door: Answers to Questions About Ministering to Inactive Members*, affirms that we need to educate and train as many church members as possible in this visitation ministry to the inactive members (p. 179).

Why train them? Because most people are new at this ministry and feel unprepared and afraid of the task of visiting. Training them before they go out will take away some of the fear and help them feel better prepared. Field experience is the best school. They will learn much more when they are actually visiting, but prior training will help them avoid some common mistakes and painful moments. It is like learning how to swim. The swimmer in training needs to be in a pool and actually get wet to learn how to swim, but instruction will avoid unnecessary trouble. It will speed up the learning process.

This is what Braden (1987) says on the topic:

An absolute essential ingredient in an effective program is education. It need not be long or elaborate. People learn much more visiting than they do in a training session; but regular opportunities to increase skills and to clarify their own faith experiences encourages people and helps them grow spiritually. Many churches with effective visitation report that they provide short training periods for people almost every time they visit. (p. 41)

The subject of education and training is so important that Harre (1984), in his book *Close the Back Door*, dedicates a whole chapter to the subject of preparing church members to minister to inactive members with material for six training sessions (pp. 92-109). Preparing church members by giving them instruction, will help launch an effective program to reach the inactive members.

System of Accountability.

In order for a visitation program to be successful, there should be accountability. The church member visitation team should be accountable for the work of visiting the inactive members. It is part of their responsibility to do the job of visiting. Ministry will be ineffective and inefficient if there is a lack of accountability. This is what Lindgren and Sawchuck (1980) say in the book *Let My People Go: Empowering Laity for Ministry*: "In order to improve the quality of the church's ministry and enable the volunteers to experience success and satisfaction, the pastor must attack head on this matter of lack of accountability in the local church" (p. 31).

An accountability plan begins with a list of the names of inactive members. Those names can be divided by geographical areas or by ages or whatever method the visitation team thinks works best. Then the leader knows who is responsible for visiting what member. The person visiting then writes down the date they visited each name and reports back to the church board, the board of elders, or the deacon board regarding the

visits made monthly or quarterly.

Church members involved in the ministry of visitation should go two by two. Jesus followed this method. Luke 10:1 says: "After these things the Lord appointed seventy others also, and sent them two by two before His face into every city and place where He Himself was about to go." The job of knocking on doors is probably one of the most dreaded and shunned by church members. Going two by two will not only make each other accountable but it will encourage those visiting the inactive members to be faithful and not to get discouraged. Doing this task alone can disheartened even the best.

In conclusion, one of the most important elements of a successful visitation program is an accountability process. Responsibility should be clearly delineated, exactly who is responsible for each name on the inactive list, to whom does the visiting team report their visits to (i.e., the church board, board of elders, etc.), and how often are they are required to report. Otherwise the visitation program will limp along or die a slow painful death.

Making Visits Effective

There are five important steps to an effective visit of a missing member: make an appointment, break the ice, listen, read the Bible, and pray. All of these five steps are needed for the seed to germinate and sprout in the heart of the inactive member and get them back in the pew again.

Make an Appointment

To prepare the soil, the visiting ministry team needs to send a letter or a card with the church logo announcing the visitation program so that the inactive member does not think they are being individually targeted. When the inactive member receives the letter

or the card, it will mention that there is a church visitation program taking place. Consequently, these inactive members will be more open and at ease about people coming to visit them in their home.

The visitor needs to call in advance and make an appointment. Unless there is no record in the church directory of having a telephone number or the member who stopped coming to church has a history of antagonism and rebellion, people need to call to make an appointment with the inactive member. Making an appointment shows that you value your time and theirs. Eight out of ten will be glad to meet people from the church. Surveys have shown that nearly 80% of the people being visited will welcome a home visit from someone in the church (Shelley, 1984, pp. 79-84). The visit should not happen the same evening as the phone call to schedule it. Call two or three days in advance or even one or two weeks ahead of time so the inactive members can make room in their calendars.

Break the Ice

The most challenging part of the visit, but also the most rewarding, is breaking the ice. It will take a conscious effort on the part of the church member to remember not to get down to business right away, especially if the visitor is shy.

In the chapter "Breaking the Ice and Getting Past Hello," Haugk (1992), in his book *Reopening the Back Door: Answers to Questions About Ministering to Inactive Members*, writes this question and answer:

Q. As a way to break the ice and get the conversation going, should I first ask the inactive member why he or she became inactive, and then get into a discussion of that?

A. That is the exact opposite of what you should do. Starting there would be meeting your needs, not looking to the needs of the inactive member. Your focus has to be on the other's needs. (p. 121).

The issue of inactivity should not be brought up until the chill in the air has been warmed. If the inactive member is a total stranger to the visitor, there should be some getting acquainted and getting to know each other first. This is the time when, if the inactive is a cat lover and the visitor also likes cats, they can share stories. If the visitor notices a vegetable garden by the house, the visitor can ask about what the inactive is growing. These questions will lead to conversation starters that will help the inactive member feel that the visitor cares about them and that they are friendly. If the inactive member and visitor know each other, then catching up with the latest happenings will break the ice.

There are two things the visitor needs to practice a lot, looking around and smiling. Looking around will give the visitor clues about the inactive members' lives and smiling will let those who stopped coming to church know they are safe.

Again, it is imperative to look for things to ask questions about: paintings, photos, collectibles, antique cars outside, pets, etc. These are ice breakers that the visitor can use as he or she is coming in. The visitor can admire some of those items and/or ask questions about them and let the inactive member share the meaning those items have in their lives. A very important lesson one needs to learn about life is that people want to share their lives with others. They are hungry to be heard. When people talk about the things that matter to them, they will lower their guard and the ice will be broken.

Listen

Listening will play a major role in the success of the visit. This may require a lot of effort for some people who are accustomed to talking. Members who volunteer to do visitation ministry tend to be extroverts. They like meeting and talking to people.

Therefore, this can be a challenging skill for them to acquire since the main reason the visitor is there is not to talk but to listen. Dicks (1955), in his book *You Came Unto Me: A Guidebook in Pastoral Calling for Ministers and Laymen*, says: "Listening is the opposite of preaching and it calls for a high degree of discipline on the part of the listener" (p. 37).

On the issue of listening, Jones (1988), in his book *Reclaiming Inactive Church Members*, says: "A chief characteristic of persons who are effective in reclamation is their ability to listen. The lecture approach is definitely inappropriate for this ministry" (p. 92). The same author emphasizes that "the ministry group needs to be equipped as listeners" and how the ministry of visitation is "ministering with our ears" (Jones, 1988, p. 97).

Listening has been considered by some writers as a type of ministry. Just like children ministry or youth ministry, listening can be a ministry. Knutson (1979), in his book *Ministry to Inactives: A Manual for Establishing a Listening Witness to Inactive Members*, asserts that listening can be used to witness to people. Listening to people can bring people back into the church.

Once the visitor and the inactive member sit around the table or in the living room, the visitor needs to discipline themselves to listen to people. It is imperative to make mental notes while listening to some of the complaints, illnesses, misfortunes, and even the positive things that people share, so that later, the visitors can include them in their prayers for the inactive members at the end of the visit.

However, it is not only important to listen and take mental notes, but the visitor should let the inactive know he/she is listening. And how do they know the visitor is

listening? Eye contact will let the inactive member know the visitor is interested in what they are saying. Nodding the head shows them the visitor is engaged in the conversation. Smiles and frowns communicate interest. Verbal yes's and no's are a sounding board to the talker. This does not mean that the visitor says nothing about him or herself or that the visitor is not allowed to share and add to the conversation, but it should be kept to a minimum.

Child (1970), in his book dealing with visitation ministry, says the following:

How can we make conversation? The advice of the Gospel is: "Let your speech be Yea, Yea: No, No. And that which is over and above there is evil." (Matthew 5:37) But the context explains the lesson. Our speech should not be used to curse or revile. On our visits we have to say more than "Yes" and "No". But quite often we can allow the people to do most of the talking. The less we talk the more intelligent we are likely to appear. (p. 16)

Listening does not mean that the visitor sits and says nothing or does not add anything to the conversation. In his book, *The Ministry of Listening: Team Visiting in Hospital and Home*, Peel (1980) talks about creative listening. He says that in creative listening there is both passive and active listening. In passive listening one person talks and the other listens and responds with "aha," "yes," "mmm," "sure," etc. In active listening, one person talks and the listener verbally identifies with the speaker's feelings, or asks questions to encourage people to talk. The visitor should be exercising both passive and active listening. There are times when all the visitor needs to do is listen and there are times when the visitor realizes the person needs words of encouragement or advice. The creative listener is one who can distinguish one from the other (pp. 33-35).

Listening is a skill that may take time to develop. But the more it is practiced, the easier it gets. Interpersonal skills come easier to some people than others, but one will notice that God will help in making the visit pleasant and spiritual.

The church member needs to avoid heavy subjects on the first visit. If the inactive member asks theological questions, the visitor may want to give them a simple answer and suggest they meet another time to study the question better. If the inactive member has criticism against the church, the church member may want to ask them for suggestions for change, but not spend two hours trying to solve the problem with them. Politely assure the inactive member that addressing their concerns and questions is important, but it needs to be on a different occasion when more time is allotted for that purpose.

In conclusion, listening is exercised when making the original phone call. Listening is also used when breaking the ice. Creative listening is needed when hurting people are sharing their life story, their pain, their sorrow and they hearts. Good listening skills are essential to the success of reclaiming inactive members.

Read the Bible

The visitor needs to select a scripture beforehand: a promise of hope or an uplifting verse that will "cut to the heart." That is what Peter did on the day of Pentecost. The Bible says: "When they heard *this*, they were cut to the heart" (Acts 2:37). Peter used the Bible appropriately, and it achieved its intended purpose. It penetrated people's heart:

For the word of God *is* living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. (Heb 4:12)

A careful selection of Bible promises should be readily available somewhere in the Bible of the visitor. The more the church member is familiar with the use of his/her sword, the better the person gets at it. The visitor will learn to discern needs and find a

Bible promise that will fit the life of that person. For instance, I visited a sister who had many cats. I could tell she liked cats, because she talked about their behavior and the types of cats she had and what each one did to amuse her. At the end of our visit, I opened my Bible and read to her Isa 11:6, "The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the young goat, the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them." I told her about heaven and how she would be able to have big cats in heaven and never be afraid. I told her about life in heaven and how God wants to spend eternity with us.

Most inactive members will never be offended by the visitor reading a Bible verse, especially a verse that is not condemning but redeeming. The Bible verse that we read should not recriminate or point the finger but should be redemptive and loving. The inactive member knows he or she should be in church. Many of them, during the course of the conversation, will tell the reasons why they stopped coming to church. The volunteer in visitation ministry should not use this time of Bible reading to preach to them and explain the theology of a verse. A brief explanation and application to their daily spiritual walk is enough. Let the Bible do the job. The following advice is applicable:

The major part of the sacrament of conversation, however, is the words that are spoken. "Lord, to whom can we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life", said Peter. The words of the Twenty Third Psalm, the words of the Lord's Prayer, properly used and in the proper place are instruments for accomplishing a desired purpose which are as real as the surgeon's instruments that are used to open an abdomen. (Dicks, 1955, p. 31)

There is power in the Bible. If the visitor leaves the home without opening the Bible, the visitor did not allow God to speak to the inactive member. Bible reading is God's word speaking directly to the people. God wants to talk to the inactive member.

The Bible promises this:

For as the rain comes down, and the snow from heaven, and do not return there, but water the earth, and make it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; it shall not return to Me void, but it shall accomplish what I please, and it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it. (Isa 55:10-11)

The Bible promise is that His word will never go back empty. Bible reading will do something in the heart of the hearer. The reading of Bible passages (such as, Lam 3:22-23, "Through the Lord's mercies we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness," or 1 Pet 5:7, "Casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you") should be accompanied by words of encouragement and hope. Ellen White (1943) has this to say about reading the Bible:

There is nothing more calculated to energize the mind and strengthen the intellect than the study of the Word of God. No other book is so potent to elevate the thoughts, to give vigor to the faculties, as the broad, ennobling truths of the Bible. (p. 460)

This may be the appropriate time for the visitor to share very briefly what the Lord did in his or her life and what role the Bible played in having an active faith. Then the visitor invites the person to pray.

Pray

James 5:16-20 says:

Confess *your* trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much. Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain; and it did not rain on the land for three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth produced its fruit. Brethren, if anyone among you wanders from the truth, and someone turns him back, let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins.

These last two verses in the book of James deal with those who stopped coming to

church because it talks about people who wandered from the truth. James encourages the brethren to turn sinners from their error. The context of this passage dealing with inactive members is prayer. When members pray for one another, healing happens. Just like Elijah prayed for a revival in God's people and the Lord answered his prayer, when church members pray for people to come back to the narrow path, God works in the life of the inactive member. Prayer allows divine influences to touch their lives.

On the issue of prayer, Ellen White (1911) says in *Acts of the Apostles*:

Prayer is heaven's ordained means of success in the conflict with sin and the development of Christian character. The divine influences that come in answer to the prayer of faith will accomplish in the soul of the suppliant all for which he pleads. For the pardon of sin, for the Holy Spirit, for a Christlike temper, for wisdom and strength to do His work, for any gift He has promised, we may ask; and the promise is, "Ye shall receive." (p. 564)

What does the church member need to include in the prayer? If the inactive member talked about grandchildren or parents, they need to be included in the prayer. If the visitor happens to have a good memory and remembers the names of the people the inactive member mentioned, they need to be mentioned in the prayer by name. Also include the successes they have accomplished in life and the blessings they have received, if those were part of the conversation. The visitor should try to recapture, in a nutshell, what the inactive member shared throughout the conversation. This will let them know that the visitor does care and is aware of their joys and struggles.

Ellen White (1977) in *Steps to Christ* says:

Prayer is the opening of the heart to God as to a friend. Not that it is necessary in order to make known to God what we are, but in order to enable us to receive Him. Prayer does not bring God down to us, but brings us up to Him. (p. 64)

When the visitor prays with the inactive members, they are elevating them to the throne of grace. This is an intercessory prayer that is done on their behalf. The language

one uses should reflect the opening of the heart to God as to a friend. The prayer should be simple and sincere. The visitor should leave the formal prayers with *thee* and *thou* for the church. Talk to Jesus as one would to a friend.

Hybels (2004), in his book *The Volunteer Revolution: Unleashing the Power of Everybody*, says the following:

What does a faithful priest do for his people? Prays for them. Encourages them. Watches over them. Confronts them. Grieves with those who grieve. Rejoices with those who rejoice. As a result, the people feel loved, nurtured, secure, and blessed. (p. 60)

Let the prayer of the visitor in behalf of those who stopped coming to church be done in such a way that the inactive member will feel loved, nurtured, and blessed.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the literature points to everybody, church members and pastors, as being responsible for reaching out to the inactive members. Current literature asserts this should be a dynamic ministry in the local churches. It will help to close the back door, and it will also create *koinonia* in the local congregation by showing genuine love to others. However, effective visitation of inactive members is a learned skill. Callahan (1983) said:

The art of visitation is a developmental art. One does it best when one does it regularly. One does best when one does it over a period of years. It is not an art one learns quickly or easily, because it is, finally, the art of responsibly helping people with their human hurts and hopes in an active, intentional, seeking out way. (p. 16)

The need to visit inactive members is towering. There are many people who are no longer coming to church, but they love the Lord. Some inactive members are angry, but the majority just slip away. God calls upon the shepherds to seek those sheep who have gone astray. Jesus' ministry mainly concentrated on inactive members. Jesus is

calling on elders, the shepherds of the local church, to do home visitation. God also calls the deacons and deaconesses, the servants of the local congregation, to visit the missing members. With proper preparation, lots of prayer, and effective visits, many people who stopped coming to church will be in God's kingdom. Inactive members are not really inactive. They are active people who have filled their time with other things. A visit from a dedicated and consecrated church member may place their spiritual priorities back in order.

CHAPTER IV

DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CHURCH MEMBER VISITATION PROGRAM

The Aim of the Project

The aim of this dissertation project was threefold. First and foremost, the aim was to reclaim inactive members who have stopped attending the Hillsboro Church. The second aim was to get church members from the Hillsboro Church involved in visiting inactive members of their own congregation. Third, I wanted to develop a training program that could be duplicated in other churches to train their members for the ministry of reclaiming inactive members.

The training program will serve a dual purpose. First of all, as discussed in previous chapters, the job of the pastor is not to do the work, but to equip the saints for the work of ministry. However, the task of training members to serve can be overwhelming to a pastor that is already overloaded with work. It is my hope that the program I have developed will make it easier for other pastors to fulfill their mission of equipping the saints for ministry. The second purpose is that training the church members to do the work of seeking the sheep who left the fold will not only lighten the load of the pastor but will help the members themselves to grow and mature spiritually.

The Spark Behind the Project

I began my ministry in Spanish speaking churches. About six years later I began working in English speaking churches. One of the first things I noticed was that fewer members attended in English churches than in Spanish churches. It was astonishing to see the big discrepancy between the membership on the books and the number of people actually attending the worship service. On average, in Hispanic churches attendance is 60% to 70% of the membership. However, in English churches attendance is only about 40% to 50% of the membership. With this kind of drop in attendance, I really missed the members who were not present on Sabbath morning. This inspired me to have an active visitation program with the church elders in the churches I pastored.

When I began my dissertation program, I was very aware of the vast need to train English speaking church members to reclaim inactive members through a visitation program. As I did further research on this subject, I realized that it is a widespread problem. Specifically, as the following statistics for the Oregon Conference show, the number of inactive members is not only large, but it is growing every year.

Oregon Conference Attendance

The following statistics were given in the quadrennial report at the Constituency Session of the Oregon Conference in 2008. The "membership" column is the total number of members for all churches in the Oregon Conference. The "attendance" column shows the total average attendance of all churches in the Oregon Conference. The Oregon Conference computes numbers by churches submitting the attendance for six consecutive Sabbaths, then they drop the highest and lowest attendance Sabbaths and then they average the other four. The last column shows the total church attendance for

the Conference as a percentage of the total membership on the books.

Table 1.

Membership and Attendance in Oregon Conference

Year	Membership	Attendance	Attendance %
2005	33,479	16,740	50 %
2006	34,333	16,136	47 %
2007	34,775	16,344	47 %
2008	35,223	16,203	46 %

One surprising fact from this chart is that while attendance statistics for the Oregon Conference are declining, the membership on the books is increasing. In 2005 there were 33,479 members, and in 2008 there were 35,223 members in the Conference. With membership increasing by about 600 new members a year, the assumption would be that attendance would be increasing also. Unfortunately, as the attendance numbers showed, the number of saints sitting in the pews is actually decreasing. The problem becomes even more apparent considering that the way churches report attendance is by counting every person in the church (members, visitors, children, and even babies) on a Sabbath morning. In some churches the number of non-members in attendance can be high; that means that the actual percentage of members who are on the books and who actually sit in the pews may be more accurately shown as between 35% and 40%.

These numbers are also consistent with all the literature reviewed by the author from other denominations. Even though this project is not intended to address this issue, it is relevant to mention that church attendance is in decline in most main line protestant churches. So the problem is not unique to the Oregon Conference or the Adventist

Church in North America but is a major problem in other denominations as well. One can point to several reasons for this problem, but it is the thesis of this dissertation that one of the main culprits is the lack of accountability for people who stop attending church.

From Vision to Reality

Having seen firsthand, in the churches that I pastored, this decline in church attendance, I developed a passion for reclaiming inactive members. My vision for my dissertation was to develop a program to stem the tide of declining attendance by getting church members involved in reclaiming inactive members. The program would reflect the teachings of the Bible and Ellen White's writings and train church members to make a difference in their own church.

However, since I am no longer a pastor of a congregation but instead have an administrative position in the Conference, I had to look for a church in which to conduct my project. In selecting a prospective church, I searched for one in which the membership was not so large that the task would be monumental. On the other hand, I did not want a church that had such a small membership that there would not be enough people to work with. Essentially, I looked for a church that represented the average church in the Oregon Conference. After reviewing the membership and attendance statistics for the churches in the Portland area, I selected the Hillsboro Church, and English speaking church.

Hillsboro Church Attendance

Looking at the statistics of church attendance in the Hillsboro Church, one can see the need for an in-reach program to reclaim inactive members.

Table 2.

Membership and Attendance at Hillsboro Church

Year	Membership	Attendance	Attendance %
2001	255	106	41%
2002	241	110	45%
2003	235	112	47%
2004	234	117	50%
2005	230	119	51%
2006	188	106	56%
2007	190	97	51%
2008	196	89	45%
2009	200	95	47%
2010	199	92	46%
2011	186	96	51%

For all practical purposes, for the last five years the Hillsboro Church has been in decline in worship service attendance, which made it a prime candidate for my dissertation project.

Hillsboro Demographics

The Hillsboro Church is English speaking and a typical Adventist church located in the greater Portland metropolitan area. The city of Hillsboro is located in the heart of the Tualatin valley. The population has increased from 79,940 in 2004 to 91,215 in 2010, with 75% of the population being 16 and over, and only 10.2% of the population being 62 and over. Hillsboro has a young population with a median age of 30.9. The city is comprised of 68.1% white with a median household annual income of \$57,096. Under educational attainment, in the City of Hillsboro, 85% of its residents have a High School diploma or higher, and 30% have a Bachelor's Degree or higher.

The Hillsboro Church was organized on August 7, 1915, 39 years after the town of Hillsboro was incorporated. This church is four years short of being a century old. It is located on a busy road in the middle of town.

When one looks at the church members on a typical Sabbath, the Hillsboro Church reflects the same statistics as the town. The Hillsboro Church has an active youth program, with a very active Pathfinder Club and children's Sabbath School Divisions. Besides the adult Sabbath School class that covers the regular Sabbath School quarterly, the church has several other adult Sabbath School classes covering different subjects. This gives any family visiting the church a wide range of activities to be involved in that meet their needs and help them feel welcome and included not only in the Spiritual activities, but also in the weekly fellowship meals that everybody is invited to.

With such an active and positive church life, one would expect to see a higher percentage of people attending church every week. It is interesting to note that the general population of the town grew by 14.1% between 2004 and 2010, but church membership diminished about 15% during the same time. The potential is there to not only have a full church service every week, but to have a second service.

God Inspired, Church Members Driven Program

After much prayer and examining church statistics, the Lord led me to call Pastor Viorel Rosca, the pastor of the Hillsboro Church, and tell him about my doctoral thesis and see if his church would be interested in participating in the program.

Right away, Elder Rosca told me that in their last board meeting the head deacon brought the idea of the Hillsboro Church doing a visitation program to every member in the congregation and the board voted to do it. Then he told me that he was looking for material to present to the church members to train them to do this visitation program, and he believed my phone call was God inspired. I told Pastor Rosca that I had a sermon series to motivate church members and a manual to train the people for the task of doing visitation. Pastor Rosca was relieved that he would not have to create the program himself, and the Board voted positively to have me come do the training.

Organization of the Program

The program began with two motivational sermons presented to the congregation as a whole. These motivational sermons were not only a spring board for the volunteers to start thinking about the project, but also to inspire people to place priority on church attendance in their personal lives. There were two training sessions on two separate Sabbath afternoons. Then the church members were put into teams, given names of

inactive members, and began doing visitation. Pastor Rosca and/or I would check in with visiting members periodically to give encouragement and pointers.

In the Hillsboro Church the invitation was extended specifically to the elders, deacons, deaconesses, and the personal ministries leader because we wanted the leadership to serve as models for the rest of the congregation, and because it was hoped that, as leaders, they would make visitation of members a lifelong habit.

The project was done in the first semester of 2011 and the members were encouraged to continue doing the visitation. When the program was proposed to the church leaders, knowing that people are more willing to volunteer for something when they know how much time they have to commit to it, we gave them a time frame of three months. However, the church members were told that it was my hope that they would not view this as just a project that would end in three months, but that it would be the beginning of a lifestyle for the church leaders.

Motivational Sermons

Two sermons were preached to motivate the members and to emphasize both the importance of and the need to be in church every week. The first sermon was entitled "The Victorious Christian Life" (see Appendix 1). I spoke on the three elements necessary to have a successful and dynamic Christian experience: (a) read the Bible, (b) pray, and (c) attend church.

Supported by Bible texts and Ellen White quotes, sprinkled with illustration from my personal life and the life of other Christians, the listeners were persuaded to make these spiritual practices a habit in their lives. Reading the Bible, praying daily, and attending church every week are imperative for every believer. I emphasized that we

cannot grow and mature as Christians unless we are doing these three things.

In the church attendance section, I spoke to the members about how easy it is to stop coming to church and the excuses people use to stop attending. I also mentioned how people often tell me, when they have not been in church: "I have not been faithful in going to church, but my faith is still strong." But my experience tells me that when people stop coming to church, it means that their faith, their Bible reading, and their prayer life are very weak and church is no longer relevant in their life.

At the end of the sermon, I made an appeal to make daily Bible reading a priority. To pick up the Bible and underline it where God spoke to them. I also emphasized how critical it is to take time to pray every day. I encouraged them to use a method that has worked for me of writing my prayers either in a notebook or on the computer. That way I stay more focused during prayer. And I made a final appeal to be faithful in church attendance and invite those who are no longer coming to church to come back. I disclosed the project the Hillsboro Church was embarking on and how there would be some church members in the congregation going around to visit people.

The second sermon was entitled: "A Need for a Revival in the Church" (see Appendix 2). With this sermon I tried to create a level of dissatisfaction with the way things are in the church. The condition of the church, including the attendance in the Adventist Church in North America is not very good. I spoke of how the church needs a revival. I told them of how I have heard the term *revival and reformation* since I was little. I have heard of the *latter rain* falling at the end of time. But unless we are praying for a revival in the church, that revival will not take place.

I preached on the vision of the valley of dry bones in Ezek 37. How in that vision

the hope of God's people was gone. How they lost their national identity and the hope of ever becoming a nation with their own temple services again. But how God told Ezekiel to call upon the Spirit to breathe into those dry bones, and how those dry bones came to life and stood like a great army, all because of God's power.

I gave the illustration of a business man who was a church member in a New York City Dutch Reformed Church, and he had the idea of opening the church for a midweek noon prayer meeting. This led to a revival in church attendance that spread to thousands of churches all across America having noon prayer meetings. He was just one church member, not happy about church attendance, and he did something about it.

I concluded with the parables of the lost sheep and the lost coin, showing how the shepherd and the woman did not give up until they found that which was lost. I emphasized that we should do the same with the missing members. We should not just leave them out there but should invite them to be part of the movement that is waiting for Jesus to come. I made an appeal for the members to pray for their church to be full, to pray for the Holy Spirit to be poured out, and for the Adventist Church to experience a revival in church attendance.

Training Seminars

Two training seminars on how to do visitation were presented (see Appendix 3). Actually it was one seminar divided into two sections and presented on two Sabbaths for members to be able to retain and assimilate the material better. Both sessions took place around 2 p.m. in the main sanctuary. The first seminary had 18 people and about 22 came to the second seminar. The seminar attendance exceeded my expectations since it was not a required meeting for the leaders of the church. I printed 15 manuals for the

first session and had to copy a few more. The second Sabbath, I printed 20 to make sure we had enough, and we had to make a few more copies again.

I began with a period of singing and prayer. The pastor introduced me and talked about the project. I distributed the manuals which had a *fill-in-the-blank* format in order to keep people engaged looking for the answers during the PowerPoint presentation I created to go with the seminar (see Appendix 4).

I began the first seminar by reading the story in Luke 5:1-11 of the miraculous fishing expedition. I spoke about how Peter, James and John, three simple fishermen, were called to be fishers of men. I also spoke of how Peter wanted to go back to fishing after Jesus' resurrection, but Jesus called him to feed His sheep. I taught the members that local church leaders can be and should be the keepers of the flock and that you do not have to have theological training to do the work of ministry. I shared with them Ephesians 4:11-16 and revealed to them that the work of ministry is given to the saints, and that pastors and evangelists are there to equip, not to do the work.

In the first training seminar, I presented part of the material written for Chapter 3 of this dissertation. In the first seminar I answered the first two questions: "Who is responsible for seeking the inactive members?" And, "Why reach out to inactive members?" I showed them with the Bible, Ellen White writings, and other material that elders, deacons, deaconesses especially, and all members generally are supposed to be involved in seeking the lost. I demonstrated how this program has the potential to bring lost people back into the church. This seminar lasted an hour and a half, and I could tell that the people were engaged and were absorbing the material in a positive way.

In the second training seminar, held the following week, I answered the third

question in Chapter 3: "How is an effective visitation program carried out in the local church?" I started with a Bible study to discover what Jesus did to reach the Samaritan woman in John 4. I pointed out how Jesus changed the conversation from talking about water from the well, to spiritual water. I shared with them, in the PowerPoint slides, the attendance statistics of the Hillsboro Church and the Oregon Conference which show the obvious need for a visitation program for these inactive members.

Then I began to train them specifically on how to carry out an effective visit with an inactive member. I taught them about the importance of "breaking of the ice", meaning that it is necessary to befriend them and win their confidence before they will be ready to listen and share on a spiritual level. I also spoke of the need to listen much and talk very little. I covered this material well since all the literature shows that a successful visit toward an inactive member depends on how well the visitor listens to the visited. And I finished by showing how to conclude the visit with a preselected Bible verse and prayer. The prayer should include any relatives present and the concerns the visited shared with them during the visit. Several members came to me afterwards to express their gratitude in taking time from my family to come and instruct them. They said that they could tell this material was well prepared and organized in a way that made sense.

This concluded the training sessions. However, I met with Pastor Rosca and the church members who volunteered to do this visitation program for one more session in order to organize the actual visits. We met on Sabbath afternoon to identify the inactive members and to distribute the names among the visitors. The church members decided they would start by visiting some of the faithful members, not only to build fellowship, but to give the visitors an opportunity to feel comfortable doing visitation. They believed

it would be easier to first visit people they knew before going to visit members they did not know. As pastor Rosca went over the list of inactive members he had previously compiled, people would raise their hand if they wanted to be the designated visitor of that name. Most of the names were recognized by the visitors, and most of them were chosen because the church member knew them, or had some common ground with those people. But a few of them were not recognized at all, and these were taken according to their geographical location.

Pastor Rosca had already compiled a list of 75 inactive members. He did not include on this list the names of people whom he knew were attending another church or names with no address or phone number. Twenty-five of those 75 inactive members were living out of state or beyond a reasonable driving distance. At the end, there were 50 names that were distributed either by geographical area or by acquaintance as explained in the previous paragraph.

Coaching Visits

A couple of weeks later, Pastor Rosca and I did a visitation program of our own. We went on three different days, visiting the church members who were doing the visitation for the purpose of coaching them. First of all we encouraged them about their visitation program and second of all we modeled for them how an effective visitation was done. They got to experience firsthand all the elements of an effective visit the way I taught them the theory during the training seminars. Some of the visitors expressed that their major concern was not the visit itself but finding a Bible verse to read to them. I gave them a list of verses to choose from that are generic to any circumstance and easily applied a person's personal life before having the final prayer.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Working in the mission field is usually considered to go and preach to people in other parts of the world who have no knowledge of God and His Son Jesus. Or to give Bible studies to men and women who have never come to church, read their Bibles, or prayed before. *The mission field*, many times, is seen as being in foreign countries that are hard to get to. But, as shown in the last few chapters, the mission field can be right on the church books. From statistics alone, there are half a million members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church here in North America who stopped coming to church. These are people who have experienced the love of God and accepted the salvation offered to them and planned to be in heaven, but now they are outside of the church, and many of them have a very shallow relationship with Jesus.

God is in the business of *fishing* for people. God has a heart for inactive members: People that once followed Him but issues in their lives or the cares of this world have distracted them. The main reason for this project was to bring some of those missing members back into the church and for church members to experience the joy of seeing a inactive members come back into the fold. My prayer is that local church members will catch the vision and see the potential for mission work within their own membership.

The first result of this project is that out of the 50 members that were the scope of

this program and were visited by church members, two came back to church. There are two souls that are now part of the Hillsboro Church because church members went to visit them. More hard work in visiting needs to be done. In gardening language, more watering, pruning, and fertilizing needs to be done for a bigger harvest later on. However, there is more rejoicing over even one sheep that has been found and brought back to the fold than for the ninety-nine that never left the fold. Hopefully more people will be part of the Hillsboro Adventist Church because of a continuing visitation program and the hard work of church members.

Another result of this project is that some people have asked to be removed from the church roster. As sad as that may be, it brings to a close some of the past and now the membership books reflect more accurately who truly is a member of the Hillsboro Adventist Church. There are many members on the church books that no longer care for the church or live a life that represents Jesus and His kingdom. A visitation program aimed at these missing members will find those who are interested in church still and those who are not.

The third result of this project is that the Hillsboro Church had an increase in attendance. The Hillsboro Church had an average attendance of 46.2% in 2010 with 92 members present out of the 199 members on the books. In the first semester of 2011, after the visitation program was done, the average attendance was 51.7% with 96 members present out of the 186 members on the roster. The Hillsboro Church saw an increase of over 5% from 2010 to 2011. The Oregon Conference has an average attendance of 47%. So at 51%, the Hillsboro Church is 4% higher than the Conference average. As Pastor Rosca said to me, "there is more movement in the church," meaning

more interaction between members when the church is open, and more excitement in the air. I believe that it may be a result of church members doing visitation of inactive and active members. This visitation program has brought more awareness of the importance of and placed more emphasis on church attendance than before.

I attained very valuable insights from this project. And the church members who participated, either visiting or being visited, benefited greatly from this project. First of all, it helped me to realize the need to have training events in the local churches. As a conference representative, I go to many different churches to preach on a regular basis, and I give seminars on different subjects. So I was surprised by the response from the local members to this visitation program. I was only expecting the elders and maybe a few more people who wanted to be part of this in-reach to inactive members to show up, but I was amazed that around 20 people came to the training events and participated in the visitation program. Even more amazing was that the number of people attending the training grew from one Sabbath to the next.

The attendance at this training event in the Hillsboro Church showed me that the church members had a hunger to be trained in their own church. Even though there are events like this during camp meeting or ministry fest here at the Oregon Conference, I am certain that some of these people would not have been able to attend or unwilling to drive the distance to participate in these Conference sponsored events. But since it was done at the local level, and aimed to specifically impact their ministry in their local church, these members were more open to participate.

It was also apparent that the people, who participated in the program by visiting inactive members, benefited in three ways. One, they were trained in doing visitation.

This training will help them for years to come. They did not receive merely theoretical knowledge, but also experiential knowledge. They not only received classroom information, facts and figures, how-to-theory, but practical participation. Second, they were actually doing the mission that Jesus asked us to do. These Hillsboro Church members were accomplishing something for God's kingdom in their local community. And third, they experienced the joy of bringing members who stopped coming to church back into the fold. They saw the fruit of their labors rewarded by seeing inactive members come back to church.

Finally, the ones who benefited the most are the people who came back to the church (and with God's help, some others still may come back in the future). Those are the people that I hope one day, when they are in heaven, will say to those doing the visitation: "Thank you for going to visit me at my home. I am in heaven because you came looking for me."

As I look back and review the results of my project at the Hillsboro Seventh-day Adventist Church, here are some recommendations:

First, more training should be given to the church members involved in the visitation program at the Hillsboro Church. As I went to visit them to encourage and to coach them, one of the areas where they expressed they felt weak was in the area of spirituality. They need to be given a list of verses to place in their Bibles that they can easily choose from to fit a particular circumstance. They also need to be given some model prayers that they can read so they feel more comfortable with the wording as they pray.

Second, have the head deacon or head elder of the Hillsboro Church be

responsible for keeping a list of inactive members; which means that a careful church attendance record should be kept by the deacons. This attendance record should include more than just the number of people present, because these numbers usually include every body present. Rather, the deacons should keep track of which members are missing from week to week. Then, members who have stopped attending would be identified much sooner and could be put on the list for visitation before they get too cold.

Third, a two or three month visitation program should take place every year. Without fail, this needs to be done once a year, every year. Ideally it should be a continuous program throughout the year, but the reality is that it is hard to keep up with a year around program because the deacons or elders will wear out.

Forth, have the board of elders or the board of deacons take ownership of the program. They need to see it as part of the duties of the elders and deacons, just like opening the church, leading in the worship service, etc. A point person, other than the pastor, should be selected to lead out in this ministry. Church members should be in charge of the ministry of visiting inactive members and not the pastor. The pastor would then be freed up to make the most difficult visits and the emergency visits with the sick and dying. It would also ensure that the program continues even if the pastor is moved and the church is without a pastor for a time.

Fifth, church attendance is important and needs to be talked about more often from the pulpit. Have the local pastor preach on church attendance regularly, just the way he preaches on stewardship or the cross during communion. The members need to be taught from the pulpit the importance of the spiritual disciplines of Bible study, prayer, and church attendance. Many times pastors emphasize the importance of prayer and even

of personal devotional time at home, but forget to talk about the need to be in church, even when the pastor is out of town. There should be a culture in the Hillsboro Church of placing priority on being in church. Devise creative ways to foster church attendance. For instance, have a ceremony that recognizes the people who most faithfully attended church in the last year. Perhaps this could be done on the first Sabbath of the new year.

Sixth, do not take for granted that the key leaders who are responsible for doing visitation actually know how to do the job. Visitation training events should be held during camp meetings and ministry fests. But there should also be local training done in the individual churches for those who are unable to attend to these events. Conference personnel and pastors should hold local church training events for the members that will equip them to do better and more effective visitation of inactive members.

APPENDIX 1

SERMON 1: THE VICTORIOUS CHRISTIAN LIFE

SERMON 1: THE VICTORIOUS CHRISTIAN LIFE

Introduction

[Show a "For Dummies" book that you may have in your library then say.]

I have a book entitled *Parenting for Dummies*. How many of you have seen the "For Dummies" books? This is what Wikipedia says about "For Dummies."

"For Dummies" books have sold in the millions. They started selling books on computer programs but they have included many subjects in medicine, construction, etc. One "for dummies" book on computers alone sold more than 50 million copies in 31 languages.

What has made these books popular is that they are simple to read and they present lengthy difficult material in a condensed easy to read manner.

With that in mind, I really could have entitled my sermon "THE VICTORIOUS CHRISTIAN LIFE FOR DUMMIES," because I want to make the subject of having a victorious Christian life simple and easy to understand. I want to show how to have a spiritual life that will not only lead me to heaven one day, but is satisfying and rewarding now.

What do I need to be in heaven? What is basic to having a dynamic relationship with Jesus? What are the most important activities I need to do, as a Seventh-day Adventist, to stay on the narrow path? If I was writing the book "THE VICTORIOUS CHRISTIAN LIFE FOR DUMMIES," I would make it three chapters long.

1. Study Your Bible Daily

Chapter 1 of "THE VICTORIOUS CHRISTIAN LIFE FOR DUMMIES" would be dedicated to teaching people the importance of reading and meditating on the scriptures every day. You need to read your Bible daily. Psalm 119:9-11:

How can a young man keep his way pure? By living according to your word. I seek you with all my heart; do not let me stray from your commands. I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you. (NIV)

How can I keep my path straight? What is going to keep me out of trouble?

Studying the Scriptures DAILY.

Do you want to have a victorious Christian life? Open your Bible EVERY DAY. Nothing will help you change your character like the Bible will. You can make external changes and look good on the outside. But true changes, which will sanctify your life, will only come if you are reading Scripture every day. You cannot be holy unless you read the Bible. John 17:17 says: "Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth" (NAU). Sanctification comes only by the Word of God.

Illustration

[Share a story of someone who has been changed by reading the Bible.]

Not long ago, I went to visit my mother in Tijuana, Mexico. I happened to go to the town square, which is like an outdoor market set up around a central park. And around the park there are people who do shoe shining. They have these little booths where the client sits on a raised chair like he's on a throne. My shoes needed shining, so I went to one of them and asked how much it would cost. And the guy said: "20 pesos." That is about \$2. I did not think that was too expensive for a professional shoe shining job. So I sat on the throne. I felt like a rich man having my shoes shined.

I looked around the chair for something to read and I saw a Bible—an open Bible. I congratulated the man for having a Bible. And he told me that he read it every day and that the Bible changed his life. That if it was not for the Bible, his life would be a mess. Then I asked him how it changed his life? I wanted him to tell me the story. He proceeded to tell me that one night, a few years before, he was in a Mexican cantina (bar) because he had a drinking problem. He had been drinking heavily and he had to go into the bathroom to throw up. There he was hunched over a toilet, a dirty toilet in a Tijuana tavern, vomiting because of his terrible alcohol problem. It was then that he remembered that when he was little he was taught that there was a God who cares about our problems. He realized that he had a serious drinking problem that he could not overcome. He had already tried and he was unable to quit. It was in those conditions, on a Saturday night about 2 o'clock in the morning, that he cried out to God and said, "God, if you exist and you care about me, please help me with my drinking problem."

He prayed this prayer around 2:00 a.m., Sunday morning. At 10:00 a.m., a friend of his knocked at his door to invite him to visit a mutual friend of theirs who was in jail. He accepted the invitation and they both went to the prison that morning. It just so happened that their mutual friend, who was in prison, was attending a Bible Study and invited them to join him. By 11:00 a.m., this man with a drinking problem, who was unable to stop his alcohol addiction, was sitting in a Bible study in a prison in Tijuana, Mexico. He said that his life changed because of reading the Bible. He finds strength and the willpower to overcome temptation because of daily Bible study.

“How can a man keep his way pure?” By reading the Bible. The Word of God will help you to overcome temptations and will also help you to live a sanctified life.

Your life will not be the same. Psalms 19:7 says: "The law of the LORD *is* perfect, converting the soul; The testimony of the LORD *is* sure, making wise the simple" (NKJ). The Bible has the capacity to change the soul. To go into the dark parts of your life and transform it. You need to read it and study it every day. Pick up your Bible during your lunch break. Read it in the morning, and also in the evening. This is the advice given to the people of God:

You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates. (Deut 6:5-9 NKJ)

Daily Bible Reading is imperative in order to have a victorious Christian life.

2. Go to Church Every Week

Chapter two of my book, "THE VICTORIOUS CHRISTIAN LIFE FOR DUMMIES", would deal with attending church every week.

Psalms 122:1 says: "I was glad when they said to me, 'Let us go into the house of the LORD'" (NKJ). A victorious Christian attends church every week. Church attendance is indispensable to a successful spiritual walk with God; especially, at this time of so much apathy and lawlessness. During the time of the end, when the narrow path becomes narrower and less people walk on it, it is imperative that we are connected with other believers. This is what Paul said to the Hebrews: "Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as *is* the manner of some, but exhorting *one another*, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching" (Heb 10:25 NKJ). The Living Bible Translation makes it very clear: "Let us not neglect our church meetings, as some

people do, but encourage and warn each other, especially now that the day of his coming back again is drawing near" (Heb 10:25 TLB).

We should not forsake attending church every Sabbath. As a pastor I have heard many excuses for not coming to church. Some people tell me: "I felt like I was coming down with something." Others tell me: "I had relatives coming from out of town." Worse yet, some people tell me: "They were short at work and I had to fill in for someone." Not only are they missing a blessing by not coming to church, but they are breaking a commandment. When you change the oil in your car instead of coming to church, or are lazy and sleep in, you are missing a blessing. The Bible says this: "How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity! . . . For there the LORD bestows his blessing, even life forevermore (Ps 133:1, 3 NIV).

It is when God's people are gathered together that God sends a blessing. Matthew 18:20 says: "For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them" (NKJ). God is present where people gather in His name. Many people are missing the blessing of hearing God's voice and feeling God's presence every week. There are many Christians who are skipping church all together. There are *Lone Ranger* Christians who think they can do it solo. Let's look at some of the reasons they give:

"I do not go to church because I am angry with the pastor or a brother in the church."

I have known dear members who stopped coming to church because they hold a grudge against someone in the church. They do not come because they do not get along with a member in the congregation. Or these dear people are not attending church because they are at odds with the pastor. Essentially they are placing their eternal life in

peril because of someone in the church. Instead of making amends with this person, they end up punishing the whole church by depriving the church of their talents. And they punish themselves by depriving themselves of the opportunity to grow spiritually. They miss the blessing of singing, praying, and reading the Bible with other Christians, all because of petty disagreements.

"I do not go to Church because there is a lot of hypocrisy among members."

You know what I tell people who say that they do not attend Church because there is hypocrisy? I tell them not to worry, to come anyway, because there is always room for one more. They would be in good company. We are all hypocrites to one extent or another. We all wear masks. Church is a place for sinners. Church is a hospital for sick people. It is like the saying I read one time: "Church is a hospital for sinners, not a museum for Saints." That is the whole reason we attend Church, because we need Christ in our lives. "When Jesus heard *it*, He said to them, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I did not come to call *the* righteous, but sinners, to repentance' " (Mark 2:17 NKJ).

"I do not go to Church because the Church does not save you. The one who saves you is Jesus."

Yes indeed, the Church does not save you. The one that saves is God. But God uses the Church as His method of salvation. The church is God's agency or institution for the salvation of people. Christ identified Himself with the Church so much, that when Jesus appeared to Saul of Tarsus, He said to Saul in Acts 9:4: "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" (NKJ). Saul was not persecuting Jesus directly, but by persecuting the Church he was persecuting Christ.

The Church does not save, but without the Church people cannot be saved. Let me explain. In the Old Testament story of the flood, God commanded Noah to build an ark. Without God's help the ark was not strong enough to withstand the flood. God had to intervene and protect the people inside the ark for them to be saved. God used the ark to save humanity. But without God's help no one could have been saved. God saved them, but only if they were inside the ark, not outside. It is the same way today with God's Church.

The Church was not invented by man, but by God. This is what Paul says to Timothy: "*I write so that you may know how you ought to conduct yourself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth*" (1 Tim 3:15-16 NKJ). The Church is not the pastor's Church, or the Church of the local head elder, but the Church of God. When a believer chooses to be absent from Church, they are choosing to reject Christ. Church is the very fellowship of believes that this brother or sister needs in order to grow into the image of Jesus.

People often tell me, when they have not been in Church: "I have not been faithful in going to Church, but my faith is still strong." But my experience tells me that, when people stop coming to Church, it means that their faith, their Bible reading, and their prayer life are very weak, and Church is no longer relevant in their life. This leads me to the third chapter of my book: "THE VICTORIOUS CHRISTIAN LIFE FOR DUMMIES"

3. Pray Without Ceasing

First Thessalonians 5:17 says: "pray continually." The call to prayer is not when I feel like it. Or only when I am in trouble. The call to pray does not only apply when I have financial problems, or my marriage is on the rocks. The Bible says to pray always.

Do you want to be a Christian with power? Then, you need to make prayer your daily work. Pray without ceasing. Pray constantly.

Illustration

[Talk about how much time and dedication it is required to build muscles.]

I go to a gym to workout. While there one day, I saw a guy who had muscles. As soon as you saw him, you knew he was strong. He would grab these dumbbells that were very heavy, one in each hand, and he would lift them for 12 to 15 repetitions. I tried to pick up one and see how many I could do. And—you guessed it—I could not even do one. Where did he get all this strength? What was his secret? I wondered. So I asked him.

I thought, "Maybe he eats special food. Maybe he bathes with some special soap. Or he probably drinks a special super juice, or takes a tonic from some exotic root from the Himalayas." Or something of that nature. But you know what he said to me? "I come here every day, six days a week. I only rest one day, and I work-out every day. Some people like to drink beer, some guys like to watch sports on TV. I like to work-out at the gym. I enjoy lifting weights."

If you want to have a successful Christian life, you are going to like to go "to the gym of prayer." Prayer is the key to winning spiritual victories. But to be successful, it cannot be just once in a while. It has to be all the time. The Bible says in Acts 1:14

"They all joined together CONSTANTLY in prayer" (NIV). On the day of Pentecost, what brought the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in the life of the early believers was prayer.

The spectacular church growth did not happen because they had a reformation in their diet, or a reformation in their dress, but all the people came together to pray.

Why is prayer so crucial to the victorious Christian life? BECAUSE PRAYER IS THE BREATH OF THE SOUL.

Prayer is the breath of the soul. It is the secret of spiritual power. No other means of grace can be substituted, and the health of the soul be preserved. Prayer brings the heart into immediate contact with the Well-spring of life, and strengthens the sinew and muscle of the religious experience. (E. G. White, *Heavenly Places*, p. 83)

Do an experiment. Hold your breath. How long can you last without breathing?

The same way you need to breathe to stay conscious, to stay alive, you need to pray to have spiritual life.

Because prayer is the key that opens the storehouse of heaven.

The darkness of the evil one encloses those who neglect to pray. The whispered temptations of the enemy entice them to sin; and it is all because they do not make use of the privileges that God has given them in the divine appointment of prayer. Why should the sons and daughters of God be reluctant to pray, when prayer is the key in the hand of faith to unlock heaven's storehouse, where are treasured the boundless resources of Omnipotence? (E. G. White, *Steps to Christ*, 94, 95).

Prayer is the key. Reach in your pocket or your purse and get your keys out. Can you imagine a life without keys? Not on this side of eternity. You need keys to get into your house. You need keys to get into your car. You need keys to go to work. Keys are an essential part of life. In the same way, you need to use the key that God gave you to open the door to the many blessings He has for you. That key is prayer.

Because prayer allows you to talk to God as to a friend.

“Prayer is the opening of the heart to God as to a friend” (Ellen White, 1977, p. 93)

If we keep the Lord ever before us, allowing our hearts to go out in thanksgiving and praise to Him, we shall have a continual freshness in our religious life. Our prayers will take the form of a conversation with God as we would talk with a friend. He will speak His mysteries to us personally. Often there will come to us a sweet, joyful sense of the presence of Jesus. . . . Prayer turns aside the attacks of Satan. (Ellen White, 1973, p. 225).

Why did Facebook become very successful? Why do people text so much? Why do most people have a cellphone? Because we want to be connected to our friends. We want to talk to family and friends. We want the interaction and the fellowship. We want the love that communication can bring.

Why do we neglect prayer when that is the way we can communicate with our best friend? It is a connection to someone who will not disappoint us? Prayer is a key element to having a very successful Christian life.

"THE VICTORIOUS CHRISTIAN LIFE FOR DUMMIES".

Chapter 1. Read your Bible daily.

Chapter 2. Attend Church every week.

Chapter 3. Pray all the time.

APPENDIX 2

SERMON 2: A NEED FOR A REVIVAL IN THE CHURCH

SERMON 2: A NEED FOR A REVIVAL IN THE CHURCH

Introduction

What is a revival? How does a revival look like? How can we bring one in the church? These are questions that I would like to explore some answers with you today. Adventists talk about a revival and reformation in the church. These are terms I have heard since I was little. "We need a revival and reformation in the church!" When we talk about revival and reformation we talk about a change—a radical change. A change that is so radical that when we experience it, we will say: "I am alive now!" "We were dead back then, now we are alive!"

Ezekiel, the Old Testament prophet, spoke to God's people when they were in exile. They had no land, no temple, and no national identity. They were in a foreign land and as far as many of God's people were concerned, they had no hope of ever going back to Jerusalem to rebuild their city, their temple, and their national identity. Ezekiel comes to bring hope back. To let them know that God was going to bring a change so amazing that the only one who will get the credit was God. The Bible says in Ezek 36:25, 26 and 36:

"Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. . . . Then the nations which are left all around you shall know that I, the LORD, have rebuilt the ruined places *and* planted what was desolate. I, the LORD, have spoken *it*, and I will do *it*" (NKJ).

Ezekiel spoke of a revival that begins with water being sprinkled in our lives: a revival that involves a surgery. A revival that God wants to perform on His people by changing the heart. God wants to give you a new heart. If I am going to experience revival and reformation in my life, it will take place by God changing from the inside and extracting my heart of stone and inserting a heart of flesh.

Illustration

[Talk about a heart transplant.]

While I was a pastor in Los Angeles, California, I liked to listen to a Christian radio station. One day, the D.J. named Michael Jackson, not related to the pop music star, was telling his audience an experience he had the day before at a local hospital. He was invited to witness a heart transplant. He described how he went through the same ritual the surgeons go through. He had to cover himself with the surgical gown, hat, shoes, and a mask. How he had to wash his hands many times, and then put the surgical gloves on. He described the surgeon cutting open the flesh on the chest of the patient and then how they used a saw to cut through the bone and open the chest. While all this was going on, the new heart was waiting to be transplanted into the patient. It was waiting in a box in ice. And Michael described how the new heart was not moving. It looked like it was dead.

Once the surgeons got the chest open, Michael described the process of cutting all the arteries from the old heart and how the doctors took it out of the chest while it was still beating.

Once the surgeons removed the old heart, they placed it on the table next to the new one, and they picked up the new heart and proceeded to attach it to the arteries.

When they were done, they gave it an electrical shock and it began to beat. When Michael turned around, the old heart had stopped beating and the new heart was inside of the patient's chest alive and giving new hope to the patient. Remarkable! Extraordinary! The patient came in with an old, worn out, sick heart and left the surgery room with a heart that was younger and full of health.

The Bible tells us that what took place in that surgery room is what God wants to do in our lives. God's people need a new heart. But also Ezekiel said that God is going to put a "new Spirit within you." Ezekiel had another vision (Ezek 37: 1-14) where he was taken to the middle of a valley full of dry bones. And God asked him the question, "Can these bones live again?" Ezekiel did not know. Then God told him to prophecy to the bones. When he does, the Spirit went into the bones and they came together. Muscles and skin grew on them but there was no life. Ezekiel was ordered again to prophecy, and then the Spirit came into them and they stood like a great army, ready to fight. It is only by the Spirit that those dead, dry bones lived again.

God wants for His people to be revived and be ready for action. God wants to take an old heart, that is sick and hard like a stone and give us a new heart, which is young, full of energy and vitality. A heart that is soft and teachable. God wants His church to be alive, active and full of energy. But I believe that there is a spiritual apathy, spiritual lethargy, and spiritual sickness.

Early Rain- Latter Rain

Since I was little, I have heard of the latter rain. That at the end of time, the latter rain was going to fall. I heard that what happened at Pentecost will be repeated again before Jesus comes back.

Ellen White says about this event in Acts of the Apostles, p. 54, 55:

It is true that in the time of the end, when God's work in the earth is closing, the earnest efforts put forth by consecrated believers under the guidance of the Holy Spirit are to be accompanied by special tokens of divine favor. Under the figure of the early and the latter rain, that falls in Eastern lands at seedtime and harvest, the Hebrew prophets foretold the bestowal of spiritual grace in extraordinary measure upon God's church. The outpouring of the Spirit in the days of the apostles was the beginning of the early, or former, rain, and glorious was the result. To the end of time the presence of the Spirit is to abide with the true church.

But near the close of earth's harvest, a special bestowal of spiritual grace is promised to prepare the church for the coming of the Son of man.

At the end of time, there would be a repetition of the early rain. That special of outpouring of the Holy Spirit at the end of time is called *the latter rain*. Ellen White in the book *The Great Controversy* pp. 611, 612 said about this end time event the following:

The work will be similar to that of the Day of Pentecost. As the "former rain" was given, in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at the opening of the gospel, to cause the upspringing of the precious seed, so the "latter rain" will be given at its close for the ripening of the harvest. "Then shall we know, if we follow on to know the Lord: His going forth is prepared as the morning; and He shall come unto us as the rain, as the latter and former rain unto the earth." Hosea 6:3. . . .

The great work of the gospel is not to close with less manifestation of the power of God than marked its opening. The prophecies which were fulfilled in the outpouring of the former rain at the opening of the gospel are again to be fulfilled in the latter rain at its close. Here are "the times of refreshing" to which the apostle Peter looked forward when he said: "Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord; and He shall send Jesus." Acts 3:19, 20.

Servants of God, with their faces lighted up and shining with holy consecration, will hasten from place to place to proclaim the message from heaven. By thousands of voices, all over the earth, the warning will be given. Miracles will be wrought, the sick will be healed, and signs and wonders will follow the believers.

Is our prophet describing a church that is alive? Yes, she is!

C.S. Lewis in his book *Mere Christianity* says: "The world is a great sculpture shop; we are the statues, and there is a rumor going around, that some of us, some day are going to come to life."

Prayer is the Answer

But how do I come alive and stop being a statue in a sculpture shop? How do I receive the latter rain? PRAY!

We need to pray for a revival. We need to pray for a renewal. The prophet Habakkuk was praying for that.

A prayer of Habakkuk the prophet... "LORD, I have heard of your fame; I stand in awe of your deeds, O LORD. Renew them in our day, in our time make them known; in wrath remember mercy." (Hab 3:1, 2 NIV).

The prophet Habakkuk was living in a time in the history of God's people when they were not faithful to God. Idolatry, harlotry, and wickedness were rampant. God's people were neglecting the most important part of life: to feed their spiritual lives. God's people did not hunger and thirst for righteousness.

Habakkuk's prayer is for revival and renewal. The prophet Habakkuk, in his prayer, tells God that he has heard of all His wonderful works in the past. He says to God that he knows of His fame. He stands in awe of his deeds. What are the deeds and works that Habakkuk is referring to? I believe that the prophet is referring to the Bible stories like:

1. The burning bush and the calling of Moses. How God heard the cry of His people and appeared to Moses to go and deliver the people of Israel from the yoke of slavery in Egypt.

2. The 10 plagues. Another story that probably came into Habakkuk's mind is the story of the exodus; how God sent one plague after another until pharaoh let the people go.

3. The parting of the Red Sea. I am sure that one of the deeds that Habakkuk was awed by was when God parted an ocean and helped 1 to 2 million people walk on dry land through the middle of the sea.

4. Cloud by day and pillar of fire by night. God also displayed His awesome deeds when he provided a cloud during the day and a pillar of fire during the night as the children of Israel journeyed through the wilderness. God's people had heating and air conditioning.

5. Water from the rock. God provided water for these millions of people from a rock. Thirst quenching, pure, refreshing water.

6. Manna for 40 years. Can you imagine feeding millions of people every day? I cannot imagine it. I feed my two boys and it seems like the food disappears. And my bank account disappears along with it.

7. The walls of Jericho. God displayed His power when the walls of Jericho came tumbling down. After six days of going around the city of Jericho one time, the seventh day they went around 7 times and then they shouted. Ahhhh! You know what note they cried out in? 🎵🎵 b-flat.

8. Samson. An incredible story of strength. A man capable of tearing off the doors of a city and carrying them away. Arnold Schwarzenegger could never do that!

9. Elijah on Mount Carmel. Elijah alone against 450 prophets of Baal. What an amazing display of power by God. Fire from heaven that consumed not only the bull, but even the rocks of the altar and the water in the trench around it.

10. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the fiery furnace. An astounding story of how God rescues His children. The people who threw them in were killed, but they were not burnt at all. And the best thing is that Jesus was right there with them.

11. Daniel in the lions' den. When Daniel was thrown into the pit full of hungry lions, the king went the next day expecting to find nothing but the remains of Daniel—maybe only a few bones, but nothing else. But there was Daniel; probably petting the lions, playing with them. He probably had a name for each one of them.

Habakkuk says: "I have seen the things you have done; but I do not see you doing those things today." "I heard you did wonderful things in the past, but I have not seen big things in my day."

Have you felt like that or thought that? Like Habakkuk, have you said, "Lord, I have heard of your wonderful deeds in the past, but I do not see them today." Somehow God is passive today; the great marvelous works of God are absent. There is a gap between what Christianity should be and what it is. Have you thought about that gap? The gap between what you read in Scripture and what takes place in your own life.

Brothers and sisters, I tell you that unless I am praying, my heart will not be changed. I will continue to have a heart of stone. God cannot perform the heavenly surgery of changing my heart into the heart of flesh.

This is what the Contemporary English Version says on our passage in Habakkuk 3:1, 2: "This is my prayer: I know your reputation, LORD, and I am amazed at what you have done. Please turn from your anger and be merciful; do for us what you did for our ancestors."

Our ancestors saw marvelous deeds. There are Bible stories that tell us about great spiritual awakenings. Moses saw it. Josiah and Hezekiah witnessed a spiritual awakening in their lifetime. John the Baptist and Peter saw how God's children came back to God like never before. Do you want to see a spiritual renewal of God's people in your lifetime?

To me it is unthinkable that I may not experience a great spiritual awakening in my lifetime. I want to be part of that outpouring of the Holy Spirit in the *latter rain*. But if I do not receive it, and if we as a church do not see a great awakening, it is because we are not asking for it.

The Bible says in Luke 11:13: "If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more *your* heavenly Father will give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!" (NKJ). James 4:2 "Yet you do not have because you do not ask" (NKJ).

What is the answer? PRAYER. A religious awakening will take place in this church when you begin to pray for it. Some of those missing members will come back when there is a church praying for them.

Illustration

In the middle of the 19th century, churches were declining here in America. Church attendance was down, religious interest was low. It was 1857 and the leaders of a church in New York City met to discuss the problem. It was a Dutch Reform church. It had been declining for some time and prayer meeting attendance was at its lowest. I am going to read it to you from the Truthkeepers' website I found (<http://truthkeepers.com/prayer1.htm>).

Wesley Duewal (Revival Fire: Zondervan Publishing House)

1857 Prayer Revival in America

A quiet, zealous forty-six-year-old businessman in New York was appointed on July 1, 1857, as a missionary in downtown New York at the Dutch Church. Jeremiah Lamphier had been converted in 1842 in Broadway Tabernacle, Finney's church that was built in 1836.

Lamphier felt led by God to start a noon-time weekly prayer meeting in which business people could meet for prayer. Anyone could attend, for a few minutes or for the entire hour. Prayers were to be comparatively brief. Lamphier's group met on the third floor of the old North Dutch Reformed Church on Fulton Street in New York. Lamphier printed some handbills announcing the prayer meetings with the title, "How Often Should I Pray?" He left these in some offices and warehouses. He also put one on the door of the church on the street side.

The first day, September 23, 1857, Lamphier prayed alone for half an hour. But by the end of the hour, six men from at least four denominational backgrounds joined him. The next Wednesday there were twenty. On October 7 there were nearly forty. The meeting was so blessed that they decided to meet daily. One week later there were over one hundred present; including many unsaved who were convicted by the Holy Spirit of their sin.

Within one month pastors who had attended the noon prayer meetings in Fulton Street started morning prayer meetings in their own churches. Soon the places where the meetings were held were overcrowded. Men and women, young and old of all denominations met and prayed together without distinctions. The meetings abounded with love for Christ, love for fellow Christians, love for prayer, and love of witnessing. Those in attendance felt an awesome sense of God's presence. They prayed *for* specific people, expected answers, and obtained answers.

Newspapers began to report on the meetings and the unusual spirit of prayer that was evident. Within three months similar meetings had sprung up across America. Thousands began praying in these services and in their own homes. In New York, gospel tracts were distributed to those in attendance, with instructions that they pray over the tracts and then give them to someone God brought to mind.

The three rooms at the Fulton Street Church were filled beyond capacity, and hundreds had to go to other places. By early February a nearby Methodist Church was opened, and it immediately overflowed. The balconies were filled with ladies. By March 19 a theater opened for prayer, and half an hour before it was time to begin, people were turned away. Hundreds stood outside in the streets because they could not get inside. By the end of March over six thousand people met daily in prayer gatherings in New York City. Many churches added evening services for prayer. Soon there were 150 united prayer

meetings each day across Manhattan and Brooklyn.

Meetings began in February in Philadelphia. Soon Jayne's Hall was overfilled, and meetings were held at noon each day in public halls, concert halls, fire stations, houses, and tents. The whole city exuded a spirit of prayer.

Prayer Meeting Fervor

Almost simultaneously noon prayer meetings sprang up all across America in Boston, Baltimore, Washington, D.C., Richmond, Charleston, Savannah, Mobile, New Orleans, Vicksburg, Memphis, St. Louis, Pittsburgh, Cincinnati, Chicago, and in a multitude of other cities, towns, and in rural areas. By the end of the fourth month, prayer fervor burned intensely across the nation. It was an awesome but glorious demonstration of the sovereign working of the Holy Spirit and the eager obedience of God's people.

America had entered a new period of faith and prayer. Educated and uneducated, rich and poor, business leaders and common workmen—all prayed, believed, and received answers to prayer. Even the president of the United States, Franklin Pierce, attended many of the noon prayer meetings. This was not a revival of powerful preaching. This was a movement of earnest, powerful, prevailing prayer.

Do you think that can happen in our church?

Habakkuk said: "I am amazed at your deeds. Renew those deeds in our day".

Psalms 2:8 says: "Ask of Me, and I will give [y]ou the nations for [y]our inheritance, and the ends of the earth for [y]our possession" (NKJ).

You can be part of a revival in our generation.

Ellen White says in *Acts of the Apostles*, p. 48:

What was the result of the outpouring of the Spirit on the Day of Pentecost? The glad tidings of a risen Saviour were carried to the uttermost parts of the inhabited world. As the disciples proclaimed the message of redeeming grace, hearts yielded to the power of this message. The church beheld converts flocking to her from all directions. *Backsliders were reconverted*. Sinners united with believers in seeking the pearl of great price (emphasis added).

Do you want your church to be full? Have you asked yourself what happened to half of the members who are not sitting on the pews? The answer is in *Acts of the*

Apostles, p. 48. When there is a praying church, the worship service attendance will

increased. Right after Pentecost, Church attendance increased when the Holy Spirit was poured. Missing members were coming back to church. I believe that this church would have to two services, if we united in prayer, would pray for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and bring a revival in our personal lives.

Conclusion

In Luke 15, Jesus tells two parables that have a message for us today. The first parable is of a shepherd who had one hundred sheep (vv. 4-7). After a day of taking the sheep to the pasture, he counted the sheep as they were going into the fold. He realized that one of them. The one that was always staying behind was missing. The story says that he left the 99 in the fold and went to look for the stray one. The shepherd did not think of leaving it behind. He did not say: "It deserves it. It always caused me troubles. I do not care. Let it be eaten by the wolves." No, the shepherd left his comfortable *Lazyboy* chair. His favorite TV show and went to look for the lost sheep. I am sure that he was praying all the way as he was looking for it. He was asking God to help him find it. And then he did. He heard the sound of a sheep in distress. The Bible says that he found the sheep, he put it on his shoulder, and took it home. The shepherd is so happy that he calls all of his friends and neighbors together and has a party.

The second story is about a woman who lost a silver coin (Luke 15:8-10). Evidently those ten coins were her entire estate. Maybe they had a sentimental value. But she was not happy when she realized that one coin was missing. She then begins to search the house. She lights a lamp and sweeps the floor. She looks in every corner, in every nook and cranny. I can almost hear her praying the whole time. She does not give

up until she finds it. And when she finds it, she is so happy that she calls her friends and neighbors together and has a party.

Notice that the coin was in the house. It was part of the collection of ten coins. At some point, the coin was not lost. It belongs to the group of ten coins, but it got lost. The sheep was also part of a group. It belonged to the fold. It followed the shepherd. But it got distracted, and it got lost. These two groups, the sheep and the coins, represent God's children. And sometimes, someone gets lost—goes missing.

There are members right now that were part of this congregation and they are not worshipping with us anymore. They were part of the fold, but they are lost in the world. They were part of the silver coins, but now they are separated. The question is: What do we do when members are missing? What do we do when the church is emptier now than 30 years ago? What do we do when there are more members missing on Sabbath morning than members who are sitting on the pews? What do we do when we realize that our church attendance is declining?

A business man in New York City, a century and a half ago decided to do something. Jeremiah Lamphier said: "I am going to pray." I am going to open the church at noon. A church member working, sweeping, searching, putting sheep on his shoulders, getting on his hands and knees, looking for a lost coin, a lost sheep, because they matter to heaven. They matter to God. All heaven rejoices when a missing member comes back to church. You can be an Adventist member who is praying for a revival and is expecting a revival in our time. The decision is yours. You can be a bench warmer, or you can get in the game and be active for God.

APPENDIX 3

TRAINING MANUAL: PART 1 AND 2

VISITATION
MINISTRY
TRAINING
SEMINAR
(PART 1)

**LEAVE ALL THE UNDERLINED WORDS BLANK IN YOUR TRAINING MANUAL*

Read Luke 5:1-11 and find modern day applications

What do the following figures represent?

Fishermen = CHRISTIANS, JESUS' FOLLOWERS, US

Fish = THE LOST, THE MISSING, THE PRODIGALS

Net = THE WORD OF GOD, THE GOSPEL MESSAGE.

Boat = THE CHURCH, THE HOME, THE FELLOWSHIP GROUP

Signaling their partners = SHARING RESPONSIBILITIES, INCLUDING OTHERS

They forsook all = GIVING UP TV, GAMES, LEISURE TIME

Luke 19:10
"For the Son of Man has come to seek
and to save that which WAS LOST."

Matt 10:5-6

These twelve Jesus sent out and commanded them, saying: "Do not go into the way of the GENTILES, and do not enter a city of the SAMARITANS. But go rather to the lost sheep of the HOUSE OF ISRAEL."

John 21:15-16 NKJV

15 So when they had eaten breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me more than these?"

He said to Him, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You."

He said to him, "*FEED MY LAMBS.*"

16 He said to him again a second time, "Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me?"

He said to Him, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You."

He said to him, "*TEND MY SHEEP.*"

Local Church Leaders Are the Keepers of the Flock

But I thought the Pastor was the keeper of the flock.

Isn't he paid to do the job of visitation?

I thought the work of ministry is done by the professionals.

Eph 4:11-16

11 And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, 12 for the equipping of the saints *for the work of MINISTRY*, for the edifying of the body of Christ, 13 till *we all* come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; 14 that *we should no longer be CHILDREN*, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of

deceitful plotting, 15 but, speaking the truth in love, *may grow up* in all things into Him who is the head—Christ— 16 from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which *every part does its share*, causes GROWTH of the body for the edifying of itself in love.

The church will NOT grow with the pastor doing the work ALONE.

Not the clergy alone, or the laity alone, but both working TOGETHER.

The Pastor has many responsibilities:

- They have board and finance meetings.
- They have school board meetings and weeks of prayer at school.
- They have sermons to prepare.
- They have people to visit in the hospital
- They have baby dedications and weddings and funerals
- They have conference mandatory meetings.
- They have counseling.
- They have a devotional life and need to exercise.
- They have a family and a private life.

Luke 10:2

Then He said to them, "The harvest truly is GREAT, but the laborers are FEW; therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest.

Who are the laborers?

Only four groups of people:

1. ELDERS= overseer, guardian, shepherd.

1 Peter 5:1-4

The elders who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed: ***SHEPHERD*** *the flock of God* which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock; and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away.

- “In a case where the conference/mission/field committee assigns an ordained minister to labor as a pastor of a church, he should be considered as the ranking officer, and the local elder(s) as his assistant(s). The pastoral work of the church should be shared by both (the pastor and the elder). The elder(s) should, in counsel with the minister, assist in the pastoral responsibility, which includes ***VISITING*** *the church members*, ministering to the sick, arranging or leading out in anointing services and child dedications, and ***ENCOURAGING*** *those who are disheartened*. Too much emphasis cannot be placed on this part of an elder’s work, who as an ***UNDERSHEPHERD*** should exercise a constant vigilance over the flock.”

Church Manual, p. 51, 52

“Planning for home visitation should be a part of the board of elders’ or church board’s agenda. Lists of names to be visited can be divided among leading church members who have the ability to minister through visitation. Those chosen ought to be trained and possibility given a territory or a group of people as their responsibility.”

Elder’s Handbook, p. 118

Elder’s Handbook, p. 105-107 has a section entitled: “Reclaiming Missing Members.” Quote: “A program to reclaim former or inactive members takes planning. . . . Plans should then be drawn up listing the methods that will be used to visit missing members. Because this is a ***DELICATE*** ministry, people chosen to visit missing members should be wisely chosen and carefully trained.”

2. DEACONS= servant, minister.

Acts 6:1-7

1 Now in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplying, there arose a complaint against the Hebrews by the Hellenists, because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution. 2 Then the twelve summoned the multitude of the disciples and said, "It is not desirable that we should leave the word of God and serve tables. 3 Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business; 4 but we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word." 5 And the saying pleased the whole multitude. And they chose STEPHEN, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit, and PHILLIP, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas, a proselyte from Antioch, 6 whom they set before the apostles; and when they had prayed, they laid hands on them. 7 Then the word of God spread, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem.

Church Manual, p. 55, 56

Duties of Deacons—The work of deacons involves a wide range of services for the church, including:

1. Assistance at Services and Meetings—Deacons are usually responsible for welcoming members and visitors as they enter the church and for assisting them, where necessary, to find seats. They also cooperate with the pastor and elders for smooth functioning of all meetings.
2. Visitation of Members—In many churches, visitation is arranged by distributing membership by districts and assigning a deacon to each district with the expectation that *he will visit each home at least ONCE A QUARTER*.
5. The Care of the Sick and the Poor—Another important responsibility of deacons is the care of the sick, relieving the poor, and

aiding the unfortunate. Money should be provided for this work from the church fund for the needy. The treasurer, on recommendation from the church board, will pass over to the deacons or deaconesses whatever may be needed for use in needy cases. This work is the particular charge of the deacons and the deaconesses.

3. WOMEN

Acts 5:14-15.

And believers were increasingly added to the Lord, MULTITUDES of both men and women.

Acts 8:12.

But when they believed Philip as he preached the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, both men and women were baptized.

Acts 17:4.

And some of them were persuaded; and a great multitude of the devout Greeks, and not a few of the LEADING women, joined Paul and Silas.

Acts 9:36.

At Joppa there was a certain disciple named Tabitha, which is translated Dorcas. This woman was full of good works and charitable deeds which she did.

- The work of God in this earth can NEVER be finished until the men AND WOMEN comprising our church membership rally to the work and unite their efforts with those of ministers and church officers. . . . It is training, education, that is needed. Those who labor in visiting the churches should give the brethren and sisters instruction in practical methods of doing missionary work
Testimonies, Vol. 9, p. 117
- WOMEN who are willing to consecrate some of their time to the service of the Lord should be appointed to visit the sick, look after the young, and minister to the necessities of the poor. They should be set apart to this

work by prayer and laying on of hands. In some cases they will need to counsel with the church officers or the minister; but if they are **DEVOTED WOMEN**, maintaining a vital connection with God, ***they will be a power for good in the church***. This is another means of strengthening and building up the church. We need to branch out more in our methods of labor. Not a hand should be bound, not a soul discouraged, not a voice should be hushed; let every individual labor, privately or publicly, to help forward this grand work. ***Place the burdens upon men and women of the church***, that they may grow by reason of the exercise, and thus become effective agents in the hand of the Lord for the enlightenment of those who sit in darkness.

Pastoral Ministry, p. 224

4. **ALL = EVERYBODY**

1 Peter 2:9-12

9 But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; 10 who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy.

- The Lord requires that far greater personal effort shall be put forth by the members of our churches. . . . Our ordained ministers must do what they can, but it must not be expected that one man can do ***the work of all***. The Master has appointed unto every man his work. There are visits to be made, there is praying to be done, there is sympathy to be imparted; and the piety--the heart and hand--of **THE WHOLE CHURCH** is to be employed if the work is to be accomplished...

Evangelism, p. 113

- “**EVERY** true follower of Christ will love souls for whom Christ died. He will leave his pleasant fireside, and the case of the wandering and lost sheep will engage his attention. The lost sheep never returns to the fold unless he is sought for and brought back.”

Youth Instructor, December 30, 1897, par. 3

Why do we visit?

1. We want to close the back door.

The front door/ back door concept.

Front Door is when people come into the church

Back door is when people leave the church

Front door events are: a. EVANGELISTIC MEETING

b. VISITORS SABBATH

c. BAPTISMS

d. CHRISTMAS PROGRAMS

Back door events are: a. DIVORCE

b. WHEN MEMBERS FIGHT

c. DISAGREEMENT WITH PASTOR

d. SIN

2. We are concerned about the BACKSLIDERER'S salvation.

When the missing member is visited it tells them that:

A. WE NOTICED THEIR ABSENCE; WE MISS THEM

B. WE CARE ; WE LOVE THEM

C. THEY ARE ACCOUNTABLE

D. THEY BELONG; THEY ARE PART OF THE CHURCH

3. We are concerned about OUR salvation.

- God could have reached His object in saving sinners without our aid; ***but in order for us to develop a character like Christ's, we must share in His work.*** In order to enter into His joy—the joy of seeing souls redeemed by His sacrifice—we must participate in His LABORS for their redemption.

Desire of Ages, p. 142

- From the time that converts come together in church capacity, they should be educated to take up such lines of work as will not only ***benefit their own souls***, but the souls of others. "The liberal soul shall be made fat: and ***he that watereth shall be watered also himself.***" The Lord has given to His followers talents of intellect and energy and means. Those who are known to be men of well-balanced minds, who have the love and fear of God before them, should be appointed as elders and deacons; and through the exercise of the ability God has given them, ***they may grow.*** . . . The church may be visited only occasionally by a minister, and ***yet be a growing church***; for Jesus is our minister, and we are never to think that we are left alone.

Pastoral Ministry, p. 226

Visitation is good for your spiritual health
Just like exercise is good for your physical health

Benefits of physical exercise:

A. IT GIVES YOU ENERGY

B. ELEVATES YOUR MOOD

C. YOU SLEEP BETTER AT NIGHT

D. STRENGTHENS YOUR BONES

Benefits of going visiting:

A. IT WILL HELP YOU BE A MORE FAITHFUL
CHURCH ATTENDER

B. IT WILL HELP YOU KNOW THE CONGREGATION

C. IT WILL MAKE YOU A MORE MATURE
CHRISTIAN

D. IT WILL GIVE YOU SPIRITUAL VITALITY

It is not an easy job

I once heard the story of a preacher who quit the ministry after twenty years and became a funeral director. When asked why he made the change, he replied, “Well, I spent three years trying to straighten out Fred, and Fred is still an alcoholic. And I spent six months trying to straighten out Susan’s marriage, and she filed for divorce. Then I spent over two and a half years trying to straighten out Bob’s drug problem, and he’s still an addict. Now at the funeral home, when I straighten them out—they stay straight.”

John C. Maxwell, *Developing the Leaders Around You*, p 111, 112

- . . . They need the tenderest sympathy and the most judicious help; they should be carefully instructed; and should be prayed for and prayed with, watched and guarded with the kindest solicitude. Those who have fallen under temptation and have backslidden from God need help. This class is represented in the lessons of Christ by the lost sheep. The shepherd left the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and hunted for the one lost sheep until he found it; he then returned with rejoicing, bearing it on his shoulder . . .

Testimonies, Vol. 4, pp. 263, 264

- ***Nothing will give greater spiritual strength and a greater increase of earnestness and depth of feeling than visiting*** and ministering to the sick and the desponding, helping them to see the light and to fasten their faith upon Jesus. ***There are disagreeable duties that somebody must do*** or souls will be left to perish. Christians will find a blessing in doing these duties, ***however unpleasant they may be***. Christ took the disagreeable task upon Himself of coming from the abode of purity and unsurpassed glory, to dwell, a man among men, in a world seared and blackened by crime, violence, and iniquity. He did this to save souls; and shall the objects of such amazing love and unparalleled condescension excuse their lives of selfish ease? shall they choose their own pleasure, follow their own inclinations, and leave souls to perish in darkness because they will meet with disappointment and rebuffs if they labor to save them? Christ paid an infinite price for man's redemption, and shall he say: My Lord, I will not labor in Thy vineyard; I pray Thee have me excused"?

Testimonies, Vol. 4, p. 75

HOW DO I DO IT?

See you next time

VISITATION
MINISTRY
TRAINING
SEMINAR
(PART 2)

*LEAVE ALL THE UNDERLINED WORDS BLANK IN YOUR TRAINING MANUAL

Read John 4:4-5

What does the following represent?

1. Woman = HOPELESS PEOPLE, THE DESPONDENT, HUMANITY
2. Empty jar = EMPTY HEARTS, SPIRITUAL THIRST
3. Noon = WHEN WE ARE GOING THROUGH TRIBULATIONS
4. Water = SPIRITUAL NOURISHMENT, ABUNDANT LIFE
5. Husbands = BROKEN RELATIONSHIPS

Visitation will help you get to know people on their turf.
Visitation is offering people to drink.

People are thirsty for living water.

He who seeks to quench his thirst at the fountains of THIS WORLD will drink only to thirst again. Everywhere men are unsatisfied. They long for something to supply the need of the soul. Only One can meet that want. The need of the world, "The Desire of all nations," is Christ. The divine grace which He alone can impart, is as living water, purifying, refreshing, and INVIGORATING the soul.

Desire of Ages, p. 187

Some of the most effective evangelism Jesus did was not in public meetings with thousands of people, but ONE ON ONE

What was the result of Jesus' visit to the Samaritan woman?

John 4:39

And MANY of the Samaritans of that city believed in Him because of the word of THE WOMAN.

Maranatha, page 103

Everywhere there are hearts *CRYING OUT* for something which they have not. They long for a power that will give them mastery over sin, a power that will *DELIVER* them from the *BONDAGE* of evil, a power that will give health and life and peace. Many who once knew the power of God's word have dwelt where there is no recognition of God, and they long for the divine presence.

Christ's method alone will give true success in reaching the people. The Saviour mingled with men as one who desired their good. He showed His sympathy for them, ministered to their needs, and *WON* their confidence. Then He bade them, "Follow me."

Let's tell people about the power available to them.

Let's give people something *TO DRINK*.

Let's go fishing . . .

Let's throw the net.

Let's get to work and see what happens

What are we talking about?

<p style="text-align: center;">A Church Member Visitation Program to Reclaim Missing Members</p>

But, how many members are missing?

Can we grow by having a visitation program?

Do we have numbers to compare?

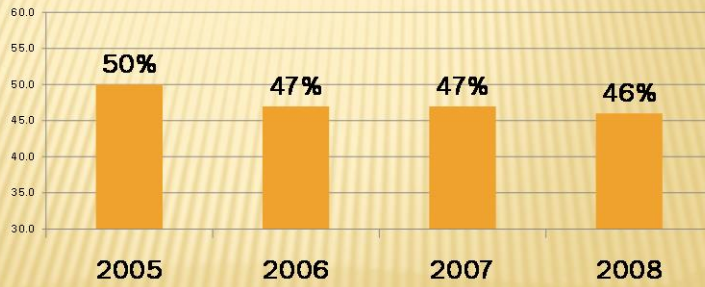
OREGON CONFERENCE YEAR-END MEMBERSHIP



OR CONF. AVERAGE ATTENDANCE PER CHURCH REPORTING



**OR CONF. ATTENDANCE
AS PERCENTAGE OF MEMBERSHIP**

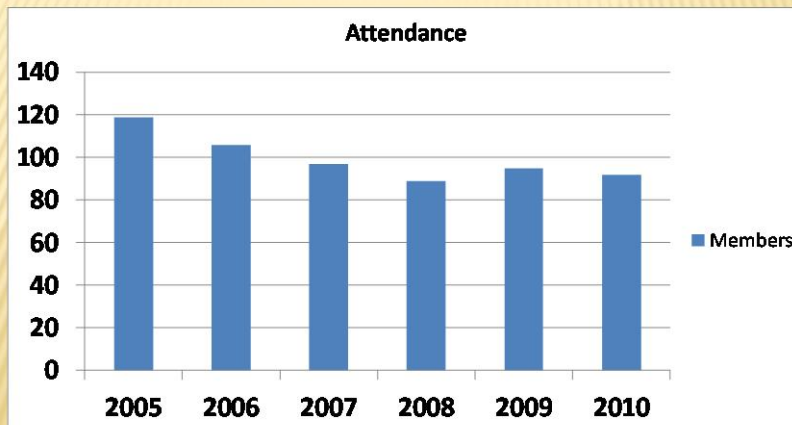


NUMBERS AT HILLSBORO SDA CHURCH

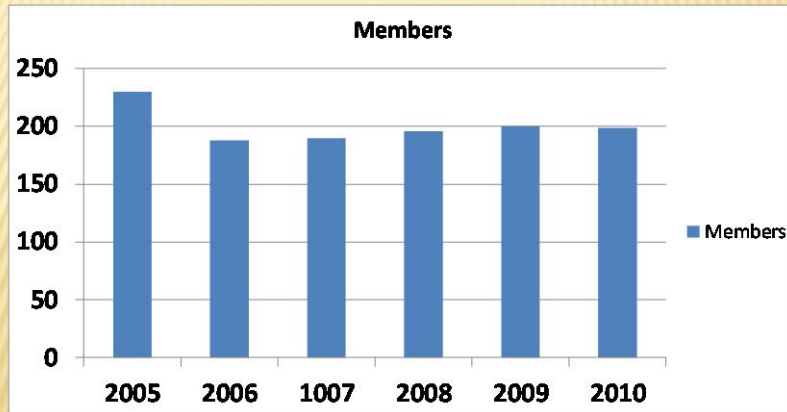
	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
Mem ber ship	250	255	241	235	234
Atten dance	151	106	110	112	117
Atten d %	60%	41%	45%	47%	50%

2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
230	188	190	196	200	199
119	106	97	89	95	?
51%	56%	51%	45%	47%	

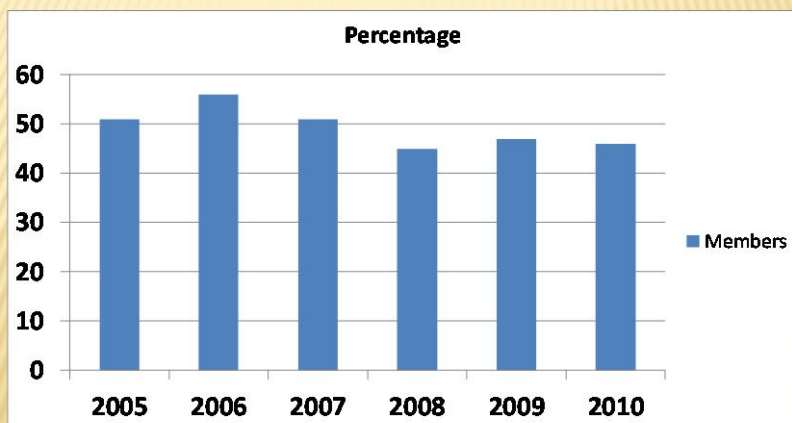
HILLSBORO MEMBERS ATTENDING



HILLSBORO MEMBERSHIP



HILLSBORO AS PERCENTAGE OF MEMBERSHIP ATTENDING



What happens when church people get to work in a visitation program?

Would the attendance grow?

What happens when the church works?

Prov 21:31

The horse is *PREPARED* for the day of battle, but deliverance and victory are of the Lord.

Acts 8:26-27

Now an angel of the Lord spoke to Philip, saying, "*ARISE AND GO* toward the south along the road which goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." This is desert. So he arose and went.

Acts 10:19-20

Peter was still trying to understand what the vision meant, when the Spirit said, "Listen! Three men are here looking for you. *SO GET READY AND GO DOWN*, and do not hesitate to go with them, for I have sent them."

<p>God will reward industriousness, not laziness.</p>

What are we trying to accomplish?

Eccl 11:1

Cast your bread upon the waters,
For you will *FIND IT* after many days.

The devil will not be happy because he knows that souls will be in the kingdom.

Satan knows that people will get back to reading the Bible and praying.

Satan well knows that all whom he can lead to NEGLECT prayer and the searching of the Scriptures, will be overcome by his attacks. Therefore he invents every possible device to engross the mind.—
The Great Controversy, p. 519.

There should be a lot of prayer.

Seven Steps to a Successful Visitation Program:

1. Church members who are going to be doing the visitation should begin a daily DEVOTIONAL time.
2. Out of the membership list, there should be a COMPILATION of names of inactive members.
3. Ask the PRAYER WARRIORS in your church to pray for those inactive members
4. Send a letter with church letterhead explaining that there is a group of members in the church DOING VISITATION to homes.
5. DIVIDE THE NAMES by geographical areas, by alphabet letters, or by personal choice of those visiting.
6. The ones visiting need to pray for THEIR GROUP of inactive members. Place the list in your Bible, or in a visible place. Pray for them.
7. Select a PARTNER to go visiting.

Luke 10:1

After these things the Lord appointed seventy others also, and sent them TWO BY TWO before His face into every city and place where He Himself was about to go.

The Visit

□ **Call to make an APPOINTMENT.**

Remember to tell them that you will be coming with your wife or another member of the church and that you have a little gift to give to them.

□ **BREAK the ice.**

The most challenging part of the visit, but also the most rewarding, is breaking the ice. It will take a conscious effort on the part of the church leader to remember not to get to business right away; especially if the church leader is shy.

Watch and SMILE a lot. Watching will give you clues about their lives and smiling will let them know they are safe.

Look for things that you can ask questions about. Paintings, photos, collectibles, antique cars outside, etc. These are ice breakers you can use as you are coming in. Admire some of those items and LET THEM SHARE with you the meaning they have in their lives.

A very important lesson you need to learn in life is: People want to share their lives with others. They are HUNGRY TO BE HEARD. And this leads to the next point.

□ **LISTEN much.**

Once we sit around the table or in the living room, we need to discipline ourselves to listen to people. It is imperative that we make mental notes while we listen to some of the complaints, illnesses, misfortunes, and even the positive things that people share with us, so that later we can include them in our prayer. Listening will play a major role in the SUCCESS of the visit. This may require a lot of effort for some of us who are accustomed to talking.

The Telephone

I have just hung up. Why did he telephone?

I don't know. . . . Oh! I get it. . . .

I talked a lot and listened very little.

Forgive me, Lord; it was a monologue and not a dialogue.

I explained my idea and did not get his;

Since I didn't listen, I learned nothing,

Since I didn't listen, I didn't help,

Since I didn't listen, we didn't commune.

Forgive me, Lord, for we were connected,

And now we are cut off.

Gerhard Knutson, *Ministry to Inactives: A Manual for
Establishing a Listening Witness to Inactive Members*, p. 15.

□ TALK little

• The ART of Listening.

Remember that the visit is not to preach to them but to listen. Listening is a skill that may take time to develop. But the more you practice, the easier it gets. Interpersonal skills come easier to some people than others, but you will notice that God will help in making the visit pleasant and fun. Avoid heavy subjects in the first visit.

• Hard questions.

If they ask THEOLOGICAL questions you may want to give them a simple answer or if they have criticism against the church you may want to ask them for suggestions for change, but don't spend two hours trying to solve the problem with them. Politely tell them that you would like to come back at another time and assure them that you want to answer their concerns when more time can be allotted for that purpose.

□ READ the Bible.

• Select a scripture BEFOREHAND. A promise of hope. An uplifting verse that will "cut to the heart." That is what Peter did on the day of Pentecost. The Bible says: "When they heard this, they were cut to the heart" (Acts 2:37). Peter used the Bible appropriately and it reached its intended purpose. It penetrated people's heart.

- Heb 4:12
For the word of God is living and powerful, and ***SHARPER*** than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.
- The Bible verse that we read should not recriminate and point the finger but it should be ***REDEMPTIVE AND LOVING***. You should not use this time of Bible reading to preach to them and explain the theology of the verse. But a brief explanation and applications to our spiritual walk is enough. Let the Bible do the job.
- The major part of the sacrament of conversation, however, is the words that are spoken. “Lord, to whom can we go. Thou hast the words of eternal life,” said Peter. The words of the Twenty Third Psalm, the words of the Lord’s Prayer, properly used and in the proper place are instruments for accomplishing a desired purpose which are as real as the ***SURGEON’S*** instruments that are used to open an abdomen.
Russell L. Dicks, *You Came Unto Me: A Guidebook in Pastoral Calling for Ministers and Laymen*, p. 31

Invite people to go to the Word.

Connect the Scripture you read to some of the issues they are facing in their lives. Tell them that there is hope.

There is nothing more calculated to energize the mind and ***STRENGTHEN*** the intellect than the study of the Word of God. No other book is so potent to elevate the thoughts, to give vigor to the faculties, as the broad, ennobling truths of the Bible.

A Call to Stand Apart, p. 69.
Counsels to Parents, Teachers and Students, p. 460
Chapter 65: “Study the Bible for Yourself”

□ **Pray**

- Prayer is the opening of the heart to God *AS TO A FRIEND*. Not that it is necessary in order to make known to God what we are, but in order to enable us to receive Him. Prayer does not bring God down to us, but brings us up to Him.
Steps to Christ, 64.
- When we pray with the inactive members we are elevating them to the throne of grace. This is an intercessory prayer that you are doing in their behalf. The language you use should reflect that you are opening your heart to God as to a friend. We should make a *SIMPLE BUT SINCERE* prayer. Let us leave the formal prayers with “thee” and “thou” to the pulpit. We need to talk to Jesus as we would to a friend.
- If the inactive member told you about grandchildren or parents, include them in the prayer. If you happen to have a good memory and remember the names they mentioned, include them in your prayer by name. Include the successes they have accomplished in life and the blessings they have received if they were part of the conversation. Try to *RECAPTURE IN A NUTSHELL* what they shared with you throughout the conversation. This will let them know that you do care and are aware of their joys and struggles.

You are God’s *AMBASSADOR*

- You are God’s representative.
- God sent you to that house.
- You are going to show God’s love to the inactive member.
- You will let them know that God loves them to death.
- Margery Williams, in *The Velveteen Rabbit*, has put real wisdom into the mouths of toy animals. Listen to this playroom conversation:
“What is real?” asked the Rabbit one day, when they were lying side by side near the nursery fender, before Nana came to tidy the room.
“Does it mean having things that buzz inside you and a stick-out handle?”
“Real isn’t how you are made,” said the Skin Horse. “It’s a thing that happens to you. When a child loves you for a long, long time, not just to play with, but really loves you, then you become Real.”

“It doesn’t happen all at once,” said the Skin Horse, “You become. It takes a long time. That’s why it doesn’t often happen to people who break easily; or have sharp edges, or who have to be carefully kept. Generally, by the time you are Real, most of your hair has been loved off, and your eyes drop out and you get loose in the joints and very shabby. But these things don’t matter at all, because once you are Real you can’t be ugly, except to people who don’t understand.”

- Hundreds, yea, thousands, who have heard the message of salvation are still idlers in the market place, when they might be engaged in some line of active service. To these Christ is saying, "Why stand ye here all the day idle?" and He adds, "Go ye also into the vineyard." Matthew 20:6, 7. Why is it that many more do not respond to the call? Is it because they think themselves excused in that they do not stand in the pulpit? Let them understand that there is a large work to be done outside the pulpit by thousands of consecrated LAY MEMBERS.

Acts of the Apostles, p. 110, 111

The mission of Christ was to heal the sick, encourage the hopeless, bind up the brokenhearted. This work of restoration is to be carried on among the needy, suffering ones of humanity. God calls not only for your benevolence, but your cheerful countenance, your hopeful words, the grasp of YOUR HAND. Relieve some of God's afflicted ones.

Some are sick, and hope has departed. Bring back the sunlight to them. There are souls who have lost their courage; speak to them, PRAY for them. There are those who need the bread of life. READ to them from the Word of God. There is a soul sickness no balm can reach, no medicine heal. Pray for these, and bring them to Jesus Christ. And in all your work, Christ will be present to make impressions upon human hearts.

E. G. White, Welfare Ministry, p. 71

THE END

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REFERENCE LIST

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