The Caring Ministry: Concepts and Methods of Ministry to Inactive Members of the Stone Tower Seventh-day Adventist Church, Portland, Oregon

John Clifton Alspaugh
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ABSTRACT

THE CARING MINISTRY: CONCEPTS AND METHODS OF MINISTRY TO INACTIVE MEMBERS OF THE STONE TOWER SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH, PORTLAND, OREGON

by

John C. Alspaugh

Chairman: Steven P. Vitrano
ABSTRACT OF GRADUATE STUDENT RESEARCH

Project Report

Andrews University
Theological Seminary

Title: THE CARING MINISTRY: CONCEPTS AND METHODS OF MINISTRY TO INACTIVE MEMBERS OF THE STONE TOWER SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH, PORTLAND, OREGON

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Date completed: April 1986

Problem

One of the greatest needs in the Seventh-day Adventist Church today is to develop a ministry to inactive members. In recent years many studies have explored the reasons why people leave the church, but very little has been done to reclaim those who become discouraged or disenchanted. The purpose of this project was to establish such a ministry to inactive members of Stone Tower Church and to evaluate the effectiveness of John Savage's "Calling and Caring Ministries" for use among Seventh-day Adventists.
Method

Lay members were trained in the concepts, skills, and methods of the Caring Ministry. Callers then visited the inactive members, seeking ways to minister to their needs and reestablish their relationship with the church. The project evaluation was written following qualitative methodology wherein the callers evaluated the training seminar, reflected on their own learning and growth, and reported the response of the inactive members.

Results

Seminar participants evaluated the training program as a valuable experience in understanding the dropout and acquiring skills for visitation ministry. They reacted positively to learning and practicing in small groups and appreciated the spirit of bonding and unity which gave them motivation and support.

Participants expressed concern over the length of time and amount of material compressed into the seminar and a perceived emphasis on knowledge, psychology and skills.

The callers' visits resulted in thirty members becoming more active in the life of the church. The callers' perspectives contributed a number of suggestions to improve the seminar and visitation program.

Conclusions

The Caring Ministry seminar and visitation program is a valuable instrument in establishing a ministry to inactive members. It can be even more effective when conducted in a two-tier format where callers learn basic skills and then are
immediately involved in visitation. When they return for the
balance of the training, the callers will be better prepared to
assimilate the concepts and skills while keeping this knowledge in
a context of ministry and mission. The Caring Ministry program can
be furthered strengthened by adapting it the unique needs of
Seventh-day Adventists--both dropouts and callers.
Andrews University
Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

THE CARING MINISTRY: CONCEPTS AND METHODS OF MINISTRY TO INACTIVE MEMBERS OF THE STONE TOWER SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH, PORTLAND, OREGON

A Project Report
Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree Doctor of Ministry

by
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April 7, 1986
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It seems that dissertations and research papers are most often dedicated to wives—and for good reason. Wives provide encouragement and support; they serve as sounding boards and editors; they put up with their husband-writers during the long months of research and writing; and then they usually get left with the manuscript to type and polish.

My wife, Loretta, has served in all these capacities and more. She is co-leader in the Caring Ministry seminar; we plan and counsel together; and we visit inactive members together. Her advice and perspective have been invaluable in this project. And finally, her Wang word processor has made the writing and rewriting of this report a little less painful.

I would also like to express appreciation to Dr. Robert Gardner of Walla Walla College for his guidance in the development of this project, particularly his help with the chapters on methodology and evaluation.
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

At the close of the 1979 John Osborn Lectures hosted by Loma Linda University, an announcement was made that the following year's series would focus on ministry to inactive church members with Dr. John Savage as speaker. I remember wishing that we would not have to wait a year to hear such a vital subject. I was the pastor of the 400-member Bellflower-Lakewood Seventh-day Adventist Church in southern California. My impression was that one-fourth to one-third of our members were inactive, and I was very anxious to learn how to draw these members back into the life and mission of the church.

The 1980 John Osborn Lectures turned out to be a three-day workshop packed with the essential concepts and skills of Savage's "Calling and Caring Ministries." On the last day of the workshop, Savage announced that the full Lab I training program was being offered at the Fresno Central Church that weekend. As quickly as we could, my associate, Mark Papendick, and I made arrangements for others to cover our responsibilities so that we could attend this training event.
After completing the basic course, Mark and I began implementing what we had learned. We were thrilled with the new concepts and skills that enabled us to be more sensitive and therefore more helpful to both active and inactive members. However, as our visitation and counseling load increased, we saw the need to involve lay members in visitation and to share the caring concepts with the entire church. Approximately six months later we joined the Lab II training course, which prepared us to teach our members and involve them in this program.

Our wives, Loretta and Earlene, participated as students in the first seminar we conducted and soon added their abilities to this growing new ministry. When the opportunity came, they also took the Lab II training with Savage. By then we had over fifty trained callers and two trained pastoral couples. We were well on our way toward having a church trained in ministry to the unique needs of discouraged or inactive members.

In 1982 the Oregon Conference invited me to become pastor of Stone Tower Church in Portland, Oregon. The conference administration expressed the desire for us to establish a Caring Ministry and reach out to the many inactive and former members in the Portland area. Building on our previous experiences, we felt ready to accept this assignment. We also saw the situation of Stone Tower Church as an appropriate setting in which to carry out the research for this Doctor of Ministry project.
Statement of the Project

It is the purpose of this project to establish a ministry to inactive members of the Stone Tower Seventh-day Adventist Church using callers who have been trained in the concepts, skills, and methods of the Caring Ministry, a model based on Savage's work and adapted for the unique needs of inactive Seventh-day Adventists.

This project is based on the premise that lay members of the church can be adequately trained for and supported in this personal, specialized visitation program, and that there are those who have dropped out of the church who will respond to this listening/caring ministry.

Definition of Terms

There are a number of interchangeable terms used throughout this report, the most common being "inactive members." Savage calls these people "dropouts"; Detamore calls them "backsliders." In other literature they may be referred to as "members in reversion," "marginally associated members," "lapsed," "delinquent," or "non-attending members."

The term "inactive member" refers to a person who currently holds membership in the church but whose lack of participation is based on "apathy" or "boredom," clinical terms John Savage uses to describe either a hopeless or helpless attitude toward involvement.

in the church. The term "inactive" does not simply mean that a person is absent from the worship service, but rather that for a variety of reasons a person's faith system, support and fellowship resources, and involvement in the life and mission of the church are either temporarily or permanently interrupted.

The term "dropout" could apply either to one who has actually dropped out of church membership or to one who has emotionally withdrawn from involvement. This does not necessarily imply that such a person has abandoned the faith, as is discussed later in this report.

The term "former member" is used in this report to describe someone who no longer belongs to the Seventh-day Adventist Church, that condition being at his or her own request or as initiated by the church.

Everett Perry et al. have devised a profile of unchurched Protestants and have placed people in categories of the estranged,

1"Helplessness is the effect felt when an individual perceives there is no help from outside of the self... Helplessness precipitates apathy. It is giving up a relationship, either human or material. In short, it is the awareness there is nothing outside of the self that can provide help; therefore, one is helpless. The antithesis of helplessness is hopelessness. Hopelessness is the feeling there is no resource inside of the self to solve a problem... The feeling of shame commonly precedes hopelessness in the response to some stress or anxiety." John S. Savage, The Apathetic and Bored Church Member: Psychological and Theological Implications (Pittsford, NY: LEAD Consultants, Inc., 1976), p. 6.

2See p. 94-99 of this report for a more complete discussion of "Identifying the Inactive Members."

the indifferent, the nominals, and the nones. Russell Hale\(^1\) has an even more refined system that includes twelve categories such as the "boxed in," the "burned out," the "drifters," the "happy hedonists," and the "nomads." These well-defined categories may be valuable to the study of the causes of apostasy but are of lesser interest to our study of the reclaiming ministry. No attempt has been made in this project to become highly technical with reference to the definition of inactivity; hence the more simplified and general use of terms in this report.

The term "Caring Ministry" is the title I have given to our local program of ministry to dropouts. It is to be distinguished from the "Caring Church" plan of reaching the community, winning converts, and nurturing and training believers as designed by the North American Division.

### Objectives and Expectations

The proposal submitted and approved at the outset of this project stated five goals:

1. The ultimate goal of the project is to establish a listening/caring ministry to inactive members in the Stone Tower Seventh-day Adventist Church, in which inactive members may be able to resolve the disappointments in their church affiliation and/or respond positively to the invitation to reaffirm their commitment.

2. It is expected that the "Caring Ministry Seminar," based on the Lab I "Skills for Calling and Caring Ministries" by LEAD Consultants, will be an effective instrument for training lay persons in a visitation ministry to inactive church members.

3. It is expected that the Stone Tower Church in general and the callers in particular will become more sensitive to the needs of less active and inactive members and will become more competent in meeting those needs.

4. The project will yield personal gain for this student by further developing his listening skills, by enhancing his ministry to the inactive church members, and by providing him the opportunity to organize and train lay persons in a support program.

5. The methods and suggestions growing out of this project may be helpful to other pastors and members of Seventh-day Adventist churches who wish to implement a visitation program directed toward inactive members or who have received training in the concepts and listening skills taught by Dr. John Savage and are planning to use them in their churches.

It is readily apparent that this is a major project with broad expectations. My project supervision committee repeatedly counseled me to keep the project focused and to use good methods in developing my evaluations and conclusions. Though torn by my desire to "be all things to all men," I have endeavored to follow their counsel.

At the outset, I anticipated that this study would come down to one basic question: Would the training program and visitation result in significant numbers of inactive members returning to the church? The emphasis on returning members seemed to be the only important goal, all else being only the means to achieve that goal. However, the longer I lived with the program, the more I realized the importance of the callers' experiences as well. Their preparation and training, their experiences in the homes of the inactive members, their ability to handle resistance and criticism, along with the suggestions and counsel they gave about the program, and the effect the training and visitation had in their own lives--these were vital to this study of the Caring Ministry.
This report, therefore, presents the theory and Biblical basis for ministry to inactive members. A description of the preparation and implementation of the Caring Ministry training seminar is presented, and the seminar and visitation program are evaluated in terms of the above-stated goals.

Methodology for Qualitative, Descriptive Study

The Church is a laboratory for the grandest of all sciences—the science of salvation. To be sure, it is different from the lab in which experiments are carried out in genetics, lasers, or microbiology. Yet the Church is a place where new programs are continually being launched, where the Scriptures are studied and applied, and where people are undergoing a wide range of religious experiences.

Little serious study, inquiry, and research is actually done in the local church. Programs, both new and old, are conducted year after year with little evaluation, reflection, or refinement. Follow-up is the Achilles heel of church programs. Because we fail to plan, execute, and evaluate, we do not learn; we do not grow as we could if we would give closer attention and systematic study to what is happening in the Church.

The evaluation we do give to church programs, the research we do conduct, is often clouded by the subjective nature of our judgment. We are selective in our observations, "evangelistic" in our counting. We need to know what we know, and how we know it.

The Doctor of Ministry program has given added emphasis to the need for ministers to give careful study to what happens in the church and to what they themselves are accomplishing. In the Doctor of Ministry program the field study encourages you to bring theory and practice together. If that is accomplished,
the motivation for research has become a part of your self-concept as a professional person. The doing of theology, the practice of ministry, will include periodic examination of your assumptions, the production of evidence as you are accomplishing what you set out to do. The field requirement provides new adequacy for your continuing education, not only because of the techniques you learn, but also because of the motivation that is provided for continual reassessment.\(^1\)

In order to give validity and reliability to our studies, scientific methodology has often been applied to religious research. This method has proven valuable, especially when the research is trying to establish something that can be quantified. The use of computers, control groups, and questionnaires has helped religious researchers avoid biases and wishful thinking and thus has made the research more credible.

However, there are so many things about church life that cannot be put into computers. One cannot adequately measure morale, evangelistic zeal, or spirituality. Church members or volunteers may resist, if not resent, being studied for research. And besides all this, the average pastor who is at home in the pulpit or at someone's kitchen table with an open Bible feels very much out of place in the world of statistics and hypothesis testing. He is generally not prepared to use sophisticated research techniques because the seminary program usually does not include such training. Statistical studies which report \("H_0: \theta = 0 \text{ in favor of } H_A: \theta \neq 0 \geq .20\)" are not very relevant to a practical, people-oriented ministry.

---

This very dilemma stymied my efforts in setting up the evaluation procedures for this project. For a long time I was bogged down by the seemingly hopeless task of applying multivariate, nonparametric statistics to my project. I had learned, with the Lord's blessing and many experiences, how to visit in the homes of inactive members and listen with sensitivity and caring. But I did not know how to submit this process to statistical research.

Then Dr. Robert Gardner, director of institutional research at Walla Walla College, introduced me to "descriptive" or "qualitative" research. Qualitative methodology is accepted in sociology, anthropology, and psychology and is well suited to many situations of religious research.

Qualitative methodology is first-hand involvement that comes from participation in that which is being studied. It aims not so much at predicting social phenomena but at understanding the phenomena. Its tools include open-ended interviewing, personal observations, descriptions of events and interactions, quotations from people about their experiences, attitudes, beliefs, and thoughts. In some instances case studies are used for in-depth presentation of people or life histories. Informants are often used to help the researcher get closer to the phenomena he or she is studying.

Through all these methods, the researcher becomes immersed in that which is being studied. Yet there must remain what Glasser
and Strauss call the "informed detachment."¹ This detachment requires that the researcher not manipulate the research setting but that he allow the data collected through "naturalistic inquiry" to jell into general hypotheses and eventually into substantive theory and conviction.

William J. Filstead argues that qualitative methodology is indeed research that is worthy of the name. Qualitative methodology allows the researcher to "get close to the data," thereby developing the analytical, conceptual, and categorical components of explanation from the data itself—rather than from preconceived, rigidly structured, and highly quantified techniques that pigeonhole the empirical social world into the operational definitions that the researcher has constructed.²

In the final analysis, the conclusions of descriptive study are those of the observer. It may be argued that they are subject to bias and are therefore unreliable. Glasser and Strauss give strong counter to this assertion:

If there is only one fieldworker involved, it is he himself who knows what he knows about what he has studied and lived through. They are his perceptions, his personal experiences, and his own hard-won analyses. The fieldworker knows that he knows, not only because he's been there in the field and because of his careful verification of hypotheses, but because 'in his bones' he feels the worth of his final analysis. He has been living with partial analyses for many months, testing them each step of the way, until he has built his final substantive theory. What is more, if he has participated in the social life of his subjects then he has been living by his analyses, testing them out not only by observation and


²William J. Filstead, Introduction to Qualitative Methodology, p. 6.
interview but also in daily livable fact. Hence by the close
do of his investigation, his conviction about his theory would be
hard to shake... This conviction does not mean that his
analysis is the only plausible one that might be based on this
data, but only that the researcher has high confidence in its
credibility.¹

Quantitative and qualitative methodologies do not need to sit
in opposition to each other. In fact, they are often complementary.

Neither of these paradigms is intrinsically better than the
other for institutional research. Instead, they represent
alternatives between which researchers can choose. Moreover,
there are a number of ways in which both qualitative and quanti­
tative approaches can be combined or used simultaneously.²

The evaluation chapter in this report was written following
primarily the methodology of qualitative study. My goal, however,
was not to demonstrate my ability to write pure descriptive research
but to present the Caring Ministry program in such a way that the
reader would understand both the substance and dynamics of the
project. Therefore I have been somewhat eclectic and included
tables, figures, and simple numerical information when they best
demonstrate the quantitative data from the program. The evaluation
is primarily descriptive—bringing together observations, reactions,
comments, perceptions, and personal convictions in an effort to
depict the real issues and dynamics of the Caring Ministry. As
student-researcher, program leader, caller and pastor, I have
endeavored to integrate the data of observation, interview, and

¹Glasser and Strauss, p. 295.
²Michael Quinn Patton, "Qualitative Methods and Approaches:
What Are They?" in Qualitative Methods for Institutional Research,
ed. Eileen Khuns and S. V. Martorana (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass
personal conviction with a conscious attempt to be both involved participant and detached observer.

Limitations of the Study

The study of the Caring Ministry is limited to the experiences of Stone Tower members who participated in training and visitation, to the reports and evaluations the callers have rendered, and to the observations and convictions of the program leaders.

No attempt was made to set up control groups to measure attitude and skill differences between those who took the training and those who did not, nor to measure the response of the inactive members who received Caring Ministry visits as compared to those who did not. In a few places, simple statistics have been incorporated, but they have not been subjected to statistical analysis for the purpose of predicting standardized results. This is a descriptive study of the experiences of those who participated in the program and an evaluation of the data collected thereby.

Even after this project is complete, many questions will remain unanswered—potential fodder for future studies: What other methods could be employed for ministry to inactive members, and which would be the most successful? How could the concept of "spiritual gifts" make the selection and use of Caring Ministry callers more effective? What is the statistical probability of inactive Seventh-day Adventists returning when ministered to through the program advocated in this report? What is the correlation factor for the many variables of age, circumstances of
dropping out, and time inactive away from the church? These questions are beyond the scope of this project and therefore remain unanswered.

It should also be pointed out that, though this report gives suggestions for adapting Jonn Savage's "Skills for Calling and Caring Ministries" to the Seventh-day Adventist Church, this is not an attempt to rewrite his program.
CHAPTER II

FOUNDATIONS

The Background of and Need for Ministry to Inactive Members

Losses from the Christian Church at Large

At first glance the New Testament does not seem to be very concerned about dropouts. Its pages are filled with the truths of Christianity, conquests of the early Church, and portrayals of apocalyptic events. Yet a closer look reveals that from the very beginning, dropping out has been a problem in the Christian church and that the Scriptures do have much to say to this need.

Even while anticipating the agony of His own death, Jesus' concern reached out to Judas, His lost disciple, and to others who might fall away because of the scandal and disillusion surrounding His crucifixion. Jesus prayed, "While I was with them, I protected them and kept them safe by that name you gave me. None has been lost except the one doomed to destruction . . . ."¹ No doubt Jesus felt a great sense of loss when the crowds turned away because of His "hard saying."² Yet these were only the forerunners of tens of thousands who likewise would set their feet on

¹John 17:12 (NIV).
²John 6:60-66.
the Christian pathway, later to give up because of persecution, apostasy, boredom, or discouragement.

The New Testament contains many direct references to apostasy and dropping out of the church. "Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world," Paul wrote to Timothy. The Epistle to the Hebrews was written to strengthen those who had become discouraged and seemed ready to return to their former way of life:

Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God. But exhort one another daily, while it is called Today; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end.

Looking into the future with prophetic insight, the Apostle Paul declared:

I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them.

Time proved the apostle to be right as the Christian church suffered great losses through the years. In the chapter "The Apostasy" in The Great Controversy, Ellen G. White identified many of the causes of this loss: heathen practices entering the church, persecution, human theories and traditions, compromise, and unconsecrated church leaders.

---

1 2 Tim 4:10.
2 Heb 3:12-14. See also Heb 10:22-26, 35-38; 12:1, 2.
In recent years, however, a new phenomenon has occurred. Nowadays we hear few of the fiery attacks on the church from antagonists or atheists such as characterized the past. The new phenomenon has been described by Robert Barrat as a "silent hemorrhage."

They leave the Church on tiptoe, without saying anything, for a thousand and one reasons, of which the principal one is their impression that the Church does not understand their needs, their aspirations—that the religion and teaching they receive is incapable of entering into their life and giving it sufficient nourishment, and that their problems of family, professional, social and political life are not understood.¹

An even more specific phenomenon that is the direct concern of this paper has to do with the large number of people who remain church members in body, but who have left it in spirit: the inactive members who attend little if at all, who may believe in their hearts, but whose outward life does not show a vibrant Christianity or a close relationship to the church.

This problem, then, has two faces. One face looks outward from the church into the world to which the members have gone. The other face looks inward to the bored, burned out, discouraged, disgruntled, inactive members.

How large is this problem? How widespread is it among the Christian churches?

Southern Baptists are alarmed by the size of the problem they face.

More than one fourth of our members are nonresidents, which means that over 3 million Baptists don't live within reach of the

¹Robert Barrat, "Schism in France?" Commonweal 82 (September 17, 1965):652.
churches where they have their membership. Another one fourth of our members are inactive residents. They live within reach of the churches where they belong, but they have no vital relationship with them.\(^1\)

Other Baptist studies confirm that at least 25 to 30 percent of the local resident members are inactive.\(^2\) Baptist author Gaines S. Dobbins has written,

One of the greatest problems of Southern Baptists today is the large number of inactive church members on our church rolls. Many churches have simply accepted the fact that at least 25 percent of their members are going to be inactive, nonresident or otherwise not accounted for.\(^3\)

John Savage's study of four Methodist congregations showed a 33 percent inactive membership.\(^4\) Since few churches keep or publish records of inactive members, the full extent of this problem is unknown. Many of the mainline Protestant churches have suffered significant losses of membership during the last

\(^1\)Delos Miles, "Solving the Inactive Resident Church Member Problem," Church Administration, October 1972, pp. 24-26. Note: The author goes on in this article to say that some of these inactive members include shut-ins, people who work on Sunday, young families with infants, older people who cannot come to church, spouses of non-members. According to the classification system later introduced in this paper, not all of these members would be considered inactive.


\(^3\)Gaines S. Dobbins, "The Deacons' Ministry to Church Dropouts," The Deacon 1 (Jan-Mar 1971):23.

\(^4\)Savage, The Apathetic and Bored Church Member, p. 76.
ten years,\(^1\) and this leads us to speculate that they must also have an inactive membership as great as or greater than the figures cited. Richard Vangerid summarized: "It seems more likely that differences from congregation to congregation and denomination to denomination would be ones of degree rather than kind."\(^2\)

One would expect that this problem of inactive members, affecting one-fourth to one-third of the membership of most churches, would have received a great deal of attention and research and that methods would have been studied and tested to reclaim those who became discouraged in their spiritual experience. Jerry Lee, who studied former Adventists in California, stated, "Little was found in the way of behavioral research on apostasy prior to 1975. This seems to be a poorly researched area."\(^3\)

Louis Nielsen studied backsliding among Michigan Adventists and made the same observation. "... practically no studies have been made of religious defection or disassociation from the church."\(^4\)


\(^3\)Jerry W. Lee, "Seeking the Lost Sheep: A Study of Membership Loss in the Southeastern California Conference of Seventh-day Adventists," Southeastern California Conference, August 1980, p. 3.

\(^4\)Louis C. Nielsen, "Disassociation: An Investigation into the Contributing Factors of Backsliding and Separation from the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Michigan" (D.Min. project report, Andrews University, 1977), p. 31.
In recent years much has been written about the causes of backsliding. Yet to this date only a handful of studies exist which document a church's efforts to reclaim former members or rekindle the fire within the lives in inactive members. The possibilities within this field for real church growth seem ripe for development.

Loss of Members from the Seventh-day Adventist Church

The Seventh-day Adventist Church has a dropout problem, but the problem is not new. Elder Theodore Carcich documented 16,879 apostasies in the years 1943 to 1946.¹ Elder Robert Whitsett appealed for a loving interest and warm invitation to be extended to the 94,848 members dropped from 1936 to 1952.² The General Conference Office of Archives and Statistics gives the total apostasies and missing in the North American Division from January 1, 1918, through December 31, 1983, as 495,342.³

From these figures Elder Don Yost has projected what the SDA world membership would be if we had not lost these members through apostasy.

If membership losses had been reduced by 25 percent, 1980 world membership would have been 4,200,961. If reduced by 50 percent:

¹Theodore Carcich, "How Can We Check Our Apostasies?" Ministry, August 1947, p. 27.

²Robert M. Whitsett, "Missing - 90,000!" Ministry, September 1953, p. 11.

³Audrey McClintic, General Church Statistics Specialist, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, for Elder Yost to writer, 12 January 1984.
Statistics over the last thirty years show that in North America, for every 100 new members who come into the church through baptism or profession of faith, 36 to 41 members leave through apostasy or become missing.\(^2\) The 1983 loss/gain ratio was 38.1 percent.\(^3\) The first quarter of 1984 the loss/gain ratio was an astonishing 65.31 percent.\(^4\)

A study of growth patterns in the Oregon Conference also shows a high loss/gain ratio. Comparing the gains through baptism and profession of faith to the losses by apostasy and missing for the years 1977 to 1983, there was a loss/gain ratio of 45.98 percent.\(^5\) This loss led Andrews University researchers to state that "controlling apostasy appears to be the most important single factor in promoting church growth in Oregon."\(^6\)


\(^3\)"North American Division Summary of Progress," 1983 Fourth Quarter Report, issued by the Director of Archives and Statistics, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists (Washington, D.C.).

\(^4\)"North American Division Summary of Progress," 1984 First Quarter Report, issued by the Director of Archives and Statistics, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists (Washington, D.C.).

\(^5\)Statistics supplied by Elder John Todorovich, Oregon Conference Secretary.

\(^6\)Roger L. Dudley; Des Cummings, Jr.; Don Ritterskamp; "A Study of Factors Relating to Church Growth in the Oregon Conference of Seventh-day Adventists" (Andrews University for the Oregon Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, August 1982), p. 38.
It should be pointed out that the statistics cited refer only to members who were actually dropped from the church records. These figures do not indicate the number who remain members but are inactive in the life and mission of the church. By extrapolation we would presume that this indicates a high percentage of inactive members who may later be dropped at their own request or by church action.

Preventing apostasies and reclaiming inactives should be two priority items on the agenda of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Membership Study of the Stone Tower SDA Church

The Stone Tower congregation has been in existence more than 100 years. It began as the East Portland Sabbath School on March 17, 1881. When the congregation built their own church facility, they named it "Central Seventh-day Adventist Church." "Old Central" was called the "Mother Church" of Portland because practically every congregation in the city was started by a nucleus from its membership. Eventually the old church became too small, and in 1953 the Stone Tower Church was erected.

Stone Tower was built as an evangelistic center, anticipating that it would provide a central location from which to evangelize the city of Portland. A paragraph taken from the "History of Stone Tower Church" records this tribute to the members and leaders of the church:

Down through the years Stone Tower (Old Central) has been a mighty power in the cause of God. She is the mother church of Portland. Hundreds have been baptized into Christ and her fellowship. Thousands have been touched by her ministry. Millions of dollars have been poured into the cause of God by
her membership. Stone Tower is a church with a great history. The Spirit of God has burned in her pulpit; strong leaders have borne her standard; consecrated, Godly Christians have comprised her membership. She has done a mighty work for eternity!

There are many factors that must be taken into consideration when analyzing membership patterns for any given church. Table 1 gives some of the factors that are easy to measure—baptisms, deaths, numbers lost through apostasy and becoming missing, transfer gain/loss totals, and the year-end membership for Stone Tower Church.

**TABLE 1**

STONE TOWER MEMBERSHIP DATA, 1970 - 1983

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Baptisms</td>
<td>798</td>
<td>804</td>
<td>813</td>
<td>820</td>
<td>779</td>
<td>871</td>
<td>944</td>
<td>848</td>
<td>847</td>
<td>784</td>
<td>732</td>
<td>589</td>
<td>559</td>
<td>552</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deaths</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>13</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apostasy &amp; Missing</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transfer Gain-Loss</td>
<td>-6</td>
<td>-21</td>
<td>-17</td>
<td>+10</td>
<td>-15</td>
<td>+41</td>
<td>+5</td>
<td>-78</td>
<td>+1</td>
<td>-24</td>
<td>+15</td>
<td>-50</td>
<td>-36</td>
<td>-5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The life and growth experience of a church is not found in just a few pieces of data but is a complex accumulation of many factors, some of which are intangible but nonetheless very real. Some of those factors would include the following:

The varying emphases and styles of leadership of the pastors
The strength and involvement of the lay leadership

The structure and facilities of the church building
The sense of mission and evangelistic program of the church
The assimilation and nurture of new members
The atmosphere of caring, love and fellowship among the congregation

Population shifts also affect the makeup of a church family. At one time Stone Tower Church was in the center of the city with a flourishing Adventist community. In recent years, however, younger families have moved to the suburbs. The Adventist institutions (North Pacific Union Conference office, Oregon Conference office, Portland Adventist Medical Center, Portland Adventist Academy, and Portland Adventist Elementary School), which were at one time within very close proximity to Stone Tower Church, have all moved to new facilities miles away from the church. These two factors alone have had a significant negative effect on the leadership, membership transfers, and morale of the Stone Tower Church.

Figure 1 shows in a graphic way the net effect on membership of many factors operating in the history of Stone Tower Church. The time period of 1970 to 1974 shows a stable church, but one with little growth. The years of 1974 to 1976 reflect a strong evangelistic emphasis with significant growth. The years since 1976 have been a period of decline.

A church in decline experiences difficulties. Pastors and members alike prefer to be in a church that is growing, or at least holding its own. Figure 2 shows baptisms over the past fourteen years. It makes us wonder: Has the church membership declined since 1976 because the baptisms were low? Or have the baptisms
Fig. 1  Stone Tower membership, 1970 - 1983

Fig. 2  Stone Tower baptisms, 1970 - 1983

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been low because the spirit and morale of the church were in decline?

When we view the growth patterns of a church from the systems perspective, we realize that no factor operates in isolation. Morale is something that everyone senses, but it is very difficult to measure. Perhaps one indicator of morale, especially in a multi-church metropolitan area such as Portland, is the transfer gain or loss. Figure 3 shows the total transfers from 1970 through 1983.

Fig. 3 Stone Tower membership transfers, 1970 - 1983

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It is difficult to see the cumulative effect of these transfers at first glance, but two years stand out as worthy of note: 1975, a year with 95 transfers in, and 1977 with 105 transfers out.

Figure 4 shows each year in terms of net transfer gain or loss. It is important to note that in only five of the last fourteen years has Stone Tower Church shown a net gain in transfers. It is also important that since 1977 the cumulative loss amounts to 177 members.

Fig. 4 Stone Tower net transfer gain/loss, 1970 - 1983
At the beginning of this project, Stone Tower members were placed in one of seven membership groups according to the information available at that time. A detailed explanation of this classification system appears in Chapter II (pp. 96, 97). Table 2 below shows the membership as it was on April 27, 1983.¹

### TABLE 2

**STONE TOWER MEMBERSHIP ACCORDING TO CARING MINISTRY CATEGORIES APRIL 27, 1983**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Number of Members</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Active</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A1</td>
<td>224</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A2</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A3</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>271</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less Active</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inactive</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C1</td>
<td>136</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C2</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C3</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>196</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>497</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Stone Tower Church draws members from a wide geographic area. In his study of the inactive members of Calvary Baptist Church, O. G. Lawless postulated that distance from the church increases the dropout potential.

A person living three or more miles from the church community is more likely to drift away from the church than when he is a part

¹Table 2 does not include the 45 deaf members who function as a congregation within the larger church family, holding their own services with their own pastor.
of the community. It is also more difficult to return from that distance and establish a pattern of faithful attendance.\footnote{\textsuperscript{1}}

In order to examine this theory, I outlined an area on the Portland map with borders approximately 3 1/2 to 4 miles from Stone Tower Church, following the natural community divisions. The residences of active and inactive members were then noted as being inside or outside that area. Figure 5 shows the designated area.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{Stone_Tower_Church.Area.png}
\caption{Area surrounding Stone Tower Church within a radius of 3 1/2 to 4 miles.}
\end{figure}

\footnote{\textsuperscript{1}O. G. Lawless, "The Covenant Fellowship Emphasis Pilot Program--Calvary Baptist Church," \textit{Church Training}, November 1976, p. 35.}
A few simple calculations were applied to the number of members in the active ($A^1$) and in the less active ($B$) and inactive ($C^1$) categories. Of the total 390 members in these categories, 45 percent lived inside the circle and 55 percent outside. Active members ($A^1$) had about the same percentage—47 percent inside, 53 percent outside. The less active ($B$) and inactive ($C^1$) members had a slightly wider spread—42 percent inside and 58 percent outside—but not such that would really substantiate the theory that greater distance from the church increased inactivity. In fact, a similar comparison for the elders, deacons, and deaconesses showed that 43 percent live within the circle, and 57 percent lived outside—a ratio almost identical to that of the inactive members.

There is no question that many Stone Tower members drive long distances to attend church and that this has some impact on extracurricular and local evangelistic activities. But it does not appear that distance alone is a large factor in the inactivity of Stone Tower members.

One of the most important factors in the life of Stone Tower Church that pertains directly to this study is the number of members dropped for apostasy or because they were missing. Figure 5 shows the number dropped over the last fourteen years.

Statistics of members dropped for apostasy/missing show only those who, in a given year, requested to be dropped or whose names were removed as a result of action initiated by the church. No records are available that would show the number of members becoming inactive in attendance or involvement.
It is important to note in the above figure that 213 members were dropped in the years 1979 to 1981. One might expect that in a church where so many members had recently been dropped, there would be a low percentage of inactive members--yet an amazing 39 percent of Stone Tower members are inactive.

Dropping so many members in a three-year period was very traumatic for Stone Tower Church. Some members agreed that, though painful, this action was necessary to bring the membership into line with practice. Other members were very upset over the large number of people dropped and questioned whether everything had been done to draw the inactive members back to the faith and fellowship of the church family.
On becoming the pastor of Stone Tower church in 1982 and suggesting the "Caring Ministry" program to the Church Board, I immediately learned their sensitivity to anything that looked like a plan to drop more members. The Board needed assurance that this program would extend a loving ministry to inactive members with a goal of reincorporating them into the life of the church. When the Church Board understood this, they became enthusiastic and were quick to endorse the Caring Ministry.

Urgency for a Reclaiming Ministry

The information cited thus far reveals a need for more than the traditional emphasis on evangelism, on winning new people to Christ and the Church. It is not just that our growth is being diminished by those who leave via the back door, but the 30-35 percent inactive members are a loss, too—a loss to the vitality of their own spiritual experience and a loss to the growth and mission outreach of the church.

Looking beyond those who have actually dropped church membership, we see a large number of people who have become inactive as events in their personal lives or in their spiritual journeys have caused them to drift away from participation in the life and mission of the church.

Leaders within the Christian church at large as well as within the Seventh-day Adventist Church are calling for a reclaiming ministry. In the early pages of his book on discipling, Caslow says:
There is mounting concern regarding membership reversion. We cannot continue to give all attention merely to accessions to the church. Somehow the answer and solution to this long-time, persistent, and chronic evangelistic weakness must be found.¹

Waldo Werning calls the problem of the delinquent or lapsed members "one of the most important objects of evangelism in the church today" and coins the term "internal evangelism"² in his call for a ministry to inactive members.

Gerhard Knutson identifies a possible reason why more has not been done to help inactive members in the past.

It is this ministry of the church to the "inactive" that is its most difficult and embarrassing task. It is a task that we have not talked about, prayed about, and thought through with enough openness. It is imperative that we take a careful look at this ministry if we are to function as the people of God which the New Testament describes.³

Yes, it is embarrassing to admit that we have a loss/gain ratio of 40 percent and that one-third of the members are inactive in the life and mission of the church. But we cannot help these people if we fail to admit the seriousness of the problem and do not put forth concerted efforts to reclaim them for Christ.

Our efforts toward making and holding strong members need to have a three-fold front:

¹Caslow, p. 53.


1. Evangelistic strategy ought to be continually reevaluated in the light of current needs and values and in terms of which types of evangelism build strong, lasting relationships to Christ and the Church.¹

2. Church leaders should continue the emphasis on assimilation and nurture of new church members.²

3. The new frontier in the well-balanced strategy of church growth is the ministry to dropouts—to those who have actually left the church and to the inactive members who have dropped out in spirit.³ Ministry to dropouts is not an option. We cannot continue to emphasize only evangelism and nurture to the neglect of reclaiming those who have lost their "first love."⁴ Dudley and Cummings' studies have led them to conclude:

> If significant church growth is to take place, we must find more effective methods—both preventative and remedial—of dealing with this problem. Controlling apostasy is absolutely essential to the mission of the church. A member who does not apostatize contributes as much to growth as a new convert.⁵

¹For further study of this topic see Win Arn and Charles Arn, "Closing the Evangelistic Back Door," Leadership 5 (Spring 1984):25-31.

²An excellent reference in this area is Lyle E. Schaller, Assimilating New Members (Nashville: Abingden, 1978).

³Three excellent references in this area are Knutson, Ministry to Inactives; Savage, The Apathetic and Bored Church Member; and Detamore, Seeking His Lost Sheep.

⁴Rev 2:4.

Ministry to inactive members is both difficult and rewarding. J. R. Spangler captioned his interview with John Savage for the Ministry magazine with these words:

The inactive church member is perhaps the most neglected aspect of the total church program, yet he symbolizes one of the greatest untapped resources for strengthening the local church.¹

Backsliding--The Member's Perspective

In order to minister to the backsliding member, we must understand something of the experience through which he or she has gone. There are a number of questions that we should ask: What causes a person to backslide? Are there common factors that all dropouts experience? Is there anything unique about the Seventh-day Adventist dropout? Does the dropout want to return? How can the church be most helpful?

Factors That Contribute to Backsliding

It is not the purpose of this paper to thoroughly investigate the causes of inactivity or apostasy. Others have done that research already.² It is helpful, however, to our overall understanding to summarize some of their findings.

The reasons for which people drop out or become inactive are as numerous as the people who experience them. Many researchers


²Three helpful studies of apostasy within the Seventh-day Adventist Church include Roger Dudley, Why Teenagers Reject Religion and What To Do About It (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publ. Assn., 1978); Lee, "Seeking the Lost Sheep"; and Nielsen, "Disassociation."
have developed intricate categories to classify the precipitants of dropping out. For the purposes of this paper, three general categories with a few subdivisions under each one suffice:

Factors in the personal life

Search for self-identity

This self-identity factor may be operative as a person experiences any of life's passages, but it is especially important during the adolescent years. Roy Zuck explains:

Young people . . . are trying to determine their own set of values apart from the family group. Sometimes they consider the church just an extension of the family control. So in their bid for complete freedom they often feel they must break with the church too.¹

Life transitions

People moving from one place to another or from one phase of life to another often leave the church or slip into inactivity. Interestingly, these same points of transition (moving, getting married, becoming a parent, etc.) can often stimulate reentry into the church life.²

Life crises

A personal crisis may have no direct relation to the spiritual life, but it often spills over into one's religious experience. Jacob Lindenthal's studies showed that the greater the degree of


psychological impairment, the more likely that the member's church attendance would decrease and he would isolate himself from organized activities at the time of the crisis. Again it should be noted that many studies have pointed out crisis as the prompter for spiritual renewal. Our conclusion: crisis causes persons to seek change; therefore the church should be sensitive to both the positive and negative effects of crisis on the spiritual life.

Pressure of time and other interests

Home, school, work, and social and recreational activities all compete with church and the personal spiritual life. "... the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and he becomes unfruitful."^{2}

Other factors

Other factors in the personal life could include marriage and family problems, physical illness, boredom, work situation, secular values, and lifestyle.

Factors in the member's spiritual life

Commitment

Some members are committed to the beliefs but not to the local church.

---


^{2} Matt 13:22 (NKJ).
They want the fruits of faith, but seem to dodge the responsibilities and obligations. Most Americans say they are Christians, but often without visible connection to a congregation of religious fellowship.

"Church participation is no longer a natural outgrowth of belief; it has become a matter of taste."²

Neglect and complacency

Ellen White has written regarding complacency:

Today a large part of those who compose our congregations are dead in trespasses and sins. They come and go like the door upon its hinges. For years they have complacently listened to the most solemn, soul-stirring truths, but they have not put them in practice. Therefore they are less and less sensible of the preciousness of truth.³

Louis Nielsen found a two-sided neglect to be a significant factor in drifting from the church.

Neglect may well be one of the main causes for drifting out of the church. The member neglects to communicate with Jesus Christ when prayer and reading of the Word are ignored; he neglects to rely upon the power of the Holy Spirit to live a victorious life; he neglects to grow spiritually by the grace of Jesus; and he neglects to seek communion with other members of the Body of Christ. Likewise the church and the pastor may neglect to provide a climate for spiritual growth after the person becomes a member of the church; they may neglect to nurture and to guide, to encourage and to support, to instruct and to provide discipline; they may neglect to reach out to the fringe members to draw them into the heart of the church; and they may neglect to always show the forgiving spirit and love of Jesus Christ.⁴


⁴Nielsen, p. 178.
Thus we see the importance of the counsel to the Hebrews:

"How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation . . . ?"¹

Factors related to the Church

Location, size, and composition of the local church

Gottfried Oosterwal has shown that

... apostasy rates were the lowest in the town and small city churches, and the highest in urban and suburban congregations. Again, the lowest apostasy rate was found in the churches ranging between 150 and 350 members.²

This reveals an important factor in Stone Tower's high level of inactive members. It is a large congregation in a relatively large city.

Program and activity levels in the church

People with special needs such as singles, young adults, senior citizens, or new members may find that their needs are not being met in the local church.

Bored out or burned out

Most of the folks who drop out are either bored out or burned out. They either find nothing of challenge and significance or have nothing left to give in the frenzy of churchy activity.³

¹Heb 2:3.


Lack of love, fellowship, and involvement

Every study of apostasy mentions this common factor. People who drop out often feel that the other members do not care for them, hence they do not have many friends, are not involved, and feel like outsiders to the church family.

Other factors

Other factors in the local church may include loss of vision, meaning, and purpose in the mission, services, and activities of the local church; conflict in the church; the level of tolerance and acceptance in the church; and unfulfilled expectations.

When church boards and business meetings discuss the apparent apostasy of members, it is common to hear someone express doubt regarding the dropout's original conversion. The Scriptures and Spirit of Prophecy lend support to this concern.

They went out from us, but they did not really belong to us. For if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us, but their going showed that none of them belonged to us.¹

It is not the fault of the gospel that apostasies occur. Those who apostatize are not truly converted. They have received the truth by halves. The light of truth has not been strengthened by practice, and it is soon quenched, leaving them in greater darkness than before.²

Presbyterians who have studied their dropouts report that only 21 percent "... had either a conversion experience or a

¹| John 2:19 (NIV).

²| Ellen G. White, MS 13, 1898, pp. 1,2,5 (MS release No. 454) as quoted in Nielsen, p. 359.
course of instruction for new members, or both, at the time they joined the Church."¹

There can be no question that many who drop out of the church were not converted, not grounded, not committed, or had only a marginal association in the beginning. But this cannot be used as a blanket assumption with which to casually cross off a member's name and assume that nothing more can be done. Studies of former and inactive members have demonstrated that many were thoroughly converted and indoctrinated and were church leaders at one time.

... few become backsliders because they were poorly indoctrinated. This, however, is the charge I most often hear ... . But such is not the case. Only a small fraction give up because of doctrinal misunderstandings or disagreements.²

Four of the respondents had served as elders at some point, and five as deacons. 33% had been church school teachers at one time or another; 47% had regularly attended church school as adults and the same proportion had taken part in Bible study or religious discussion groups. However, 29% of the respondents had done none of these things. Even so, the findings already tend to discount any simplistic explanation for people dropping out of congregations in terms of their never really having been involved.³

This study ... reveals that the unchurched are overwhelmingly "believers" and that it is not a loss of faith in most cases that has caused people to become unchurched.⁴

So what conclusion can we draw from these various studies and factors related to apostasy? Backsliding is a very complex situation. Simplistic, one-size-fits-all answers will not help the


²Detamore, Seeking the Lost Sheep, p. 10.

³McIntosh, p. 10.

church learn from those who have dropped out, nor will such answers aid us in ministering to them. As is discussed later, the precipitants to dropping out usually come in clusters.

The Caring Ministry is interested in the reasons for inactivity, not because we feel it necessary to diagnose apostasy or force members to relive a painful experience, but because awareness of the multitude of factors in backsliding will help the Caring Ministry team be more sensitive to the needs and feelings of inactive or former members and will help the church correct things in its life or program that cause dropouts or that keep people away.

The Adventist Dropout

The characteristics noted above are common among all Christians who drop out of involvement and/or practice of their faith. However, since this study focuses on Adventist dropouts, we need to ask, is there anything unique about Seventh-day Adventists who backslide?

We believe that the answer is yes, the Adventist who drops out has a unique situation. First of all, becoming an Adventist is special. Many new members come from another background, led to accept the Adventist beliefs in their pursuit of truth. They became part of the "remnant church" with truth for the last days and hope in the soon coming of Christ. They may have experienced significant lifestyle changes as new truths affected their daily lives. Many new Adventists might echo the words of Peter who said, "Lo, we have left all, and have followed thee."¹ Perhaps we

¹Mark 10:28.
would agree with the writer in Ministry who was surprised that our apostasies were not higher.

When we consider our high standards, Sabbath difficulties regarding employment, the unpopular nature of our message, and the opposition and often persecution that so many of our members face, it is wonderful that our apostasies are not much greater.¹

The high demand of the standards for faith and practice in the Seventh-day Adventist Church work both to our advantage and disadvantage as far as apostasies are concerned. Kelly suggests that in this time when liberal churches are losing members, those churches that are serious about their faith, who do not confuse or compromise their principles and who make high demands of their members, will gain and hold new converts.

We may suppose that the higher the demand a movement makes on its followers, the fewer there will be who respond to it, but the greater the individual and aggregate impact of those who do respond.²

On the other hand, the studies already cited indicate that many Adventists leave the church feeling they cannot keep the rules or live up to the standards.

The fact remains that the majority of the people seem to leave the church because they do not feel at home, they are not good enough, they feel guilty and consider themselves hypocrites. They are in a predicament. They feel in their hearts that the Adventist church is made up of God's people, and yet they are strangers within the church because they are constantly confronted with the inability or unwillingness to change their present life style to completely conform to the teachings of the church.³

¹G. Burnside, "Can We Reduce Our Apostasies?" Ministry, February 1967, p. 17.


³Nielsen, p. 173.
This situation is what John Savage calls "moral anxiety," a feeling of failure to live up to the standards of the church or to their own beliefs and convictions.

Most Adventists assume that a new convert joins the church primarily because he or she has accepted "the truth." Therefore, leaving the church is considered leaving the truth.

The Adventists consider it a serious step to separate from the church. This can only be understood in the light of the Adventist unique self-concept which embraces the strong belief that they are not just another church but a world-wide movement, called by God to spread the Gospel and warn the world of the impending return of Jesus Christ. Consequently when a person leaves the church, he gives up the truth. In a sense to give up the truth is to give up Christ, and to separate oneself from Christ is to give up salvation.

However, "truth" is not the only reason people join the church. Alongside of truth, and sometimes even ahead of it, is the need for fellowship and belonging.

There are also strong indicators that people tend to join the Seventh-day Adventist Church more out of a sense of belonging than the appeal of doctrinal purity. Conversely, they also leave the church when they no longer feel loved and cared for by the community of faith.

Implicit in membership withdrawal is a curious double standard. When people unite with a congregation, they resist suggesting personal need or social satisfactions as causes for joining. They consciously relate church membership with program participation and religious values [in other words, "truth."] When they leave, however, they are more likely to blame a breakdown in personal relationships.

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1Ibid., pp. 104, 105.


Many Adventists would be surprised to learn how many members leave the church or become inactive, yet believe the Adventist teachings. Ila Zbaraschuk reported that among young Adventists who leave the church,

Not one person mentioned doctrine as a reason for leaving. . . . A few even noted that they still practice at least some beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The Sabbath was mentioned most frequently.¹

Elder Fordyce Detamore probably had more contact with former Adventists than has any other person, and he wrote these words about the faith experience of backsliders:

A person brought up as a Seventh-day Adventist never forgets his faith completely. Even though he doesn't live it, there is almost always a deep-seated respect for the truth. . . .²

Hosts of people are really backsliders but still consider themselves Seventh-day Adventists. They listen regularly to the Voice of Prophecy, Faith for Today, or It Is Written. They go to church occasionally, but they are unattached to the church. They wouldn't belong to a different church for anything, yet they are not united with us.³

Persons in the Caring Ministry should be aware that there may still be a deep-seated belief in Adventist teachings in the hearts of inactive members. These dropouts may well echo the words of David when he said, "I have strayed like a lost sheep; come, search for they servant, for I have not forgotten thy commandments."⁴

In my visitation with inactive or former members I have found that certain teachings or experiences may be especially

²Detamore, Seeking His Lost Sheep, p. 62.
³Ibid, p. 12.
⁴Ps 119:176 (NEB).
significant. Many inactive Adventists still believe the Sabbath. Though they may work on Sabbath and not outwardly attempt to keep it holy, they often feel guilty and long for the peace and joy they once experienced on Sabbath. Christian education may also hold a soft spot in their hearts. Often they have pleasant memories of their years in church school or Sabbath School and the teachers who cared for them and helped them.

The second coming of Christ and the prophecies of the last day events are usually retained with vivid memory. Inactive or former Adventists read the newspapers and watch television, too. They see the events taking place and remember that these are signs of the nearness of Christ's coming. Many of them fully believe in the soon coming of Christ and plan to return to the church before that time. Detamore described this situation:

An encouraging thought as we go out to work for backsliders is that the majority of them still believe this message, and most of them plan definitely (or vaguely) to return someday. Many backsliders are watching with deep concern the solemn developments of the signs of the times. What a challenge to be working to bring back those who were once with us but who are now out in the cold!

Ellen White gives us encouragement that many will come back to the church in the last days before Christ returns.

... when the storm of persecution really breaks upon us, the true sheep will hear the true Shepherd's voice. Self-denying efforts will be put forth to save the lost, and many who have strayed from the fold will come back to follow the great Shepherd.²

1Detamore, Seeking His Lost Sheep, p. 29.
²White, Testimonies, 6:401.
Resistance and Receptivity

Some of the strongest statements in the Bible are made in reference to those who have once known God and then turned away in opposition:

It is impossible for those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, who have shared in the Holy Spirit, who have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the coming age, if they fall away, to be brought back to repentance, because to their loss they are crucifying the Son of God all over again and subjecting him to public disgrace.¹

If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God.²

For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning. For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them.³

Resistance is a serious matter in the spiritual life. Resistance closes the door to the heart and life and does not allow the Holy Spirit in to bring conviction, repentance, and commitment. Even God does not force His way into the resistant heart.

The Lord can do nothing toward the recovery of man until, convinced of his own weakness, and stripped of all self-sufficiency, he yields himself to the control of God. Then he can receive the gift that God is waiting to bestow. From the soul that feels his need, nothing is withheld.⁴

¹Heb 6:4-6 (NIV).
²Heb 10:26, 27 (NIV).
³2 Peter 2:20, 21.
Some who have once known Christ and been a part of the church family do not feel a need to return. It would seem that their experience has innoculated them against responding to the workings of the Holy Spirit.

As they opened the door to doubt, their hearts became so much the harder for having been momentarily softened. Satan was determined that blind eyes should not that day be opened, nor souls bound in slavery be set at liberty. With intense energy he worked to fasten them in unbelief.¹

So what prospect is there that former or inactive members will return? What chance of success is there for the Caring Ministry?

Douglas Walrath quotes David Roozen as saying that 46 percent of Americans drop out of active religious participation for at least two years sometime during their lifetime and that 80 percent of these dropouts return.² The statistics I have discovered vary widely, but none of them are that optimistic. One Gallup poll reported a 50 percent possibility of return: "... at least half of the presently unchurched could see a situation where they could become a "fairly active" member of a church. ..."³

Savage has kept some records of churches in which he has worked for inactive members.

¹Ibid., p. 238.


³George Gallup, Jr., "Four Groups Seen as Being Open to Renewed Church Involvement," PRRC Emerging Trends 4 (May 1982), pp. 1, 2. Also found in McKinney, p. 30.
There's one parish that we've tracked that had an 86 percent return rate of all the calls that were made. That's the highest we know. We also know that if the callers work hard over a period of one year, the minimum they can expect is a one-third return rate.¹

The study conducted by Perry reported two different figures, both of them very low.

Many of them [those whom Perry calls the "Estranged"] are "drop-outs," having once been active in a church, most likely a sect-type denomination. Most drifted away, mainly for contextual reasons. One in five might return to the church, under certain circumstances.²

This group [the "Nominals"] is likely to be difficult to reach. Only one in twenty of them could even imagine a circumstance when they might become active in a church.³

From the above studies, it is evident that there is no uniform rate of return. Where in this spectrum are Seventh-day Adventists? Do the positive ties to the beliefs and the expectations of the coming of Christ cause Adventists to return in greater numbers? Or do the negative influences of failure to keep the commandments and church standards or a lack of love and caring from the Adventist family prevail?

Nielsen reported that "the majority of the disassociates are not opposed to the church and that many contemplate returning to membership."⁴ But Lee's study found that only 7.14 percent felt


²Perry et al., p. 402.

³Ibid.

⁴Nielsen, pp. 234, 235.
that return was very likely, while 25 percent said they didn't know, and 42.86 percent said it was very unlikely.¹

There is an additional factor that few researchers take into consideration when discussing the probability of return, and that is the length of time the member has been inactive. Both Vangerid and Savage report considerably higher return rates for those who have recently dropped out of the church.

The people who had become inactive within the past year were the most accessible. This was true even though they were the most agitated, negative, and disagreeable. Emotions and feelings were close to the surface. As in other areas of symptomatic behavior, "early treatment" was indicated. Once the pattern of inactivity was established and the withdrawal completed, a certain chronic stability was discernible. This stability seemed very resistive to change and one which promised considerable stress if effectively altered.²

Savage's research has also revealed that there is a "limbo" period before people begin to reinvest their time and energy. If the church expresses its caring for these new inactives, the resistance factor drops considerably.

After a decision on their part to drop out has been made (it is not always a conscious decision), they will wait six to eight weeks before reengaging their time that had previously been spent in church activities. This period of "limbo" serves two functions: to get in control of the loss they have suffered and to see if anyone from the church will come and talk with them.³

Dudley states: "Former members appeared mainly undecided or pessimistic about the chances of their ever becoming Adventists again. Only 10 percent expressed any hope of joining once

¹Lee, p. 101.
²Vangerid, p. 17.
³Savage, The Apathetic and Bored Church Member, p. 69.
more."¹ In response we would ask: How long had these individuals been out of the church? Had the church ever endeavored to minister to them, or were they only surveyed for their opinions? Would it have made a difference if a caring ministry had been extended to them very shortly after they began dropping out?

It is true that "... no approach can win very resistant people while they are resistant."² But then we must raise the question Dr. Gottfried Oosterwal used to ask in his classes on church growth: Resistant to WHAT? Receptive to WHAT? Zbarschuck cited the case of a young lady named Janet: "... Janet believed strongly that she would one day return to Seventh-day Adventism—not the Adventism she had seen, but the Adventism she had been taught."³

Lurking in the hearts of many inactive or former Adventists is a haunting desire to return. Perhaps this is why so few join other churches. Nielsen reported that

Less than 5 percent of the respondents have joined another church. Repeatedly, in spite of criticism, the former members would make statements to the effect that they would never join another church other than the Adventist.⁴

Some inactives may appear to be resistant when in fact this is only an external protective device, a mask, that hides a longing heart.

¹Dudley and Cummings, p. 148.
³Zbarschuck, p. 16.
⁴Nielsen, p. 228.
Drop-outs cannot casually be assumed to be perfectly satisfied with their new status and position. And the sooner they receive pastoral care, the more likely it is to be of real value to them, even though superficially they may appear excessively hostile and cantankerous.¹

... some are now hostile, cynical, and suspicious; others are arrogant, docile, flippan, or indifferent. But the majority of the respondents are still searching, repentant, wounded, wondering, or longing to be back in the church.²

God has given a special command that we should regard the stranger, the outcast, and the poor souls who are weak in moral power. Many who appear wholly indifferent to religious things are in heart longing for rest and peace. Although they may have sunken to the very depths of sin, there is a possibility of saving them.³

Only a sensitivity to people and the prompting of the Holy Spirit will help us to know whether a dropout is lonely and longing to return, saying as did David, "Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation..."⁴ or is truly resistant, not ready to consider returning to active church life. For those who are truly resistant, we must follow the advice of Donald McGavran and others to occupy fields of low receptivity lightly with a ministry of presence.

Abandonment is not called for. Fields must be sown. Stony fields must be plowed before they are sown. No one should conclude that if receptivity is low, the Church should withdraw mission.⁵

... receptivity and resistance ebb and flow in persons and peoples. People who are receptive now may be resistant later,

¹McIntosh, p. 34.
²Nielsen, p. 109.
⁴Ps 51:12.
and vice versa. The grand strategy ... is to reach out to receptive people while they are receptive—that is the supreme way forward in church growth. But for resistant people, the policy is to hang in there with them in a mission of "presence," serving them as they will let us, saying what we can, with the long-haul policy of building bridges, plowing and planting for a later harvest, and making sure we are present for them and credible to them when they do turn more receptive.\(^1\)

It would be a tragedy for the church to consider all inactives or former members as resistant and therefore place all our efforts in more productive fields of evangelism, bringing in new people to take their places. True, one person can occupy another's spot on an empty pew, but a new member never replaces the vacancy created in the church family by the one who leaves. Furthermore, neglecting ministry to inactives because the majority are resistant would prevent us from being aware of those who are becoming receptive.

What opens the way to receptivity? What life circumstances help to open the doors that were closed through resistance?

Hunter provides some answers:

First, some events and circumstances in the life of a person ... open doors that stimulate an openness to new life-possibilities and permit the reception of previously screened-out messages. Second, God's Holy Spirit works through the events and circumstances of some people's lives to create receptivity, to "warm the heart" for the gospel. This is the Wesleyan doctrine of prevenient grace. Our gracious God goes before us into the hearts and consciousness of people, preparing for an evangelical harvest, which then takes place as he makes his actual appeal through us, his ambassadors (2 Corinthians 5:20).\(^2\)

Many writers have helped to create a list of factors that may help open the doors of receptivity:

\(^1\)Hunter, p. 81.

\(^2\)Ibid., p. 106.
Sickness, sorrow, or sudden calamity
Dissatisfaction with themselves and their lives
Personal tragedy, financial reverses or depression
Social networks: spouse, friend, neighbors who are enthusiastic
Becoming a new parent
Social and spiritual activities program in the church.

Ellen White provides the best answer for opening the door to receptivity—a Christlike sympathy shown by loving Christians.

In Christlike sympathy we should come close to men individually, and seek to awaken their interest in the great things of eternal life. Their hearts may be as hard as the beaten highway, and apparently it may be a useless effort to present the Saviour to them; but while logic may fail to move, and argument be powerless to convince, the love of Christ, revealed in personal ministry, may soften the stony heart, so that the seed of truth can take root.

Many backsliders want to return. Once they have taken a posture of resistance, once they have established a pattern of staying away or begun living a lifestyle contrary to the Adventist way of life, it is difficult for them to change. Many want to

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2 See Hunter, p. 113.
3 See Detamore, Seeking His Lost Sheep, pp. 28, 31.
4 See Perry et al., p. 402.
5 Detamore, Seeking His Lost Sheep: "Young mothers are probably the easiest of all types to reclaim. They want to come back; they want their children in church" (pp. 41, 42). Also see p. 63; Gallup: "No fewer than nine in 10 in the latest Gallup Poll say they would like their children to have religious training" (p. 2).
6 Detamore, Seeking His Lost Sheep, p. 49.
7 White, Christ's Object Lessons, p. 57.
return but they do not know how. The task of the Caring Ministry is to keep contact, communication, and a loving concern available so that as the Holy Spirit uses life circumstances to prompt receptivity, a warm, loving, human hand will be there to help them find their way back into the family.

Ellen White's counsel gives us encouragement as we work for resistant people:

When you see those who are going down to death, you will not rest in quiet indifference and ease. The greater their sin and the deeper their misery, the more earnest and tender will be your efforts for their recovery. You will discern the need of those who are suffering, who have been sinning against God, and who are oppressed with a burden of guilt. Your heart will go out in sympathy for them, and you will reach out to them a helping hand. In the arms of your faith and love you will bring them to Christ. You will watch over and encourage them, and your sympathy and confidence will make it hard for them to fall from their steadfastness.

In this work all the angels of heaven are ready to cooperate. All the resources of heaven are at the command of those who are seeking to save the lost. Angels will help you reach the most careless and the most hardened.1

The reclaiming ministry may not be easy, but it is worth the effort. Hunter believes that the church will profit from the experience even if the inactive members do not return.

If inactive members were once worth winning, they are now worth reactivating. In certain cases, inactive members may be one of our most responsive populations because, as Canon Bryan Green reminds us, "They have something to return to." But if they are inactive because the church left them as new members outside the fellowship involvement circle, they may be a quite resistant group. In any case, their renewal in the body of Christ requires the initiative of active church members. It is even worth talking to those whom we cannot reanimate—for the feedback they can give us. If we find out how we failed them, we may make the changes that will prevent us from failing others. Beside, for the sake of those who have not yet joined us, we need to love those who once joined us. If we are perceived to shower attention on prospects while forgetting

1Ibid., p. 197.
about members, then prospects understandably will be reluctant to join.¹

**Backsliding—God's Perspective**

**The Ideal and Reality**

It was never God's intention that men and women should stray from His love and care. God created us with the capacity to know and love Him, intending that this relationship should continue for eternity. But only three chapters into the Bible, we find the awful story of a fateful choice that led to sin and separation.

God's love, however, is greater than our sin. Long before Christ appeared, the prophet Jeremiah spoke the words of invitation: "The Lord hath appeared of old unto me saying, Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee."² The ultimate expression of that love is found in Jesus Christ, who opens the way to return to a close relationship with God. The past has been forgiven; we can be new creatures in Christ!

> For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.³

> Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.⁴

There can be no doubt that God's ideal is that, once effected, this transformation and restoration should be permanent. When commissioning the disciples to go and bring forth fruit, Jesus spoke of this permanence and added, "... that your fruit should

¹Hunter, pp. 136, 137. ²Jer 31:3. ³2 Cor 5:21. ⁴2 Cor 5:17.

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remain..."¹ The Apostle Paul stressed the same ideal: "...being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus."²

However, in two interesting parallel passages, the Apostle John shows us both the ideal and reality. The ideal: "I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth."³ The reality: "It has given me great joy to find some of your children walking in the truth, just as the Father commanded us."⁴

I do not want to make too great a case for that little word "some," but the point is still there that not all of God's children accept His gracious invitation and not all of those who do accept it remain in that saving relationship. Thus, "some of your children (are) walking in truth." The reality and tragedy is that many Christians neglect or reject their salvation.

In the following passage we feel the intensity of Paul's concern that the believers he had established in Thessalonica remain faithful to their commitment to Christ:

My friends, when for a short spell you were lost to us--lost to sight, not to our hearts--we were exceedingly anxious to see you again. So we did propose to come to Thessalonica--I, Paul, more than once--but Satan thwarted us. For after all, what hope or joy or crown of pride is there for us, what indeed but you, when we stand before our Lord Jesus at his coming? It is you who are indeed our glory and our joy.

¹John 15:16.
²Phil 1:6 (NIV).
³3 John 4.
⁴2 John 4 (NIV).
So when we could bear it no longer, we decided to remain alone at Athens, and sent Timothy, our brother and God's fellow-worker in the service of the gospel of Christ, to encourage you to stand firm for the faith and, under all these hardships, not to be shaken; for you know that this is our appointed lot. When we were with you we warned you that we were bound to suffer hardship; and so it has turned out, as you know. And thus it was that when I could bear it no longer, I sent to find out about your faith, fearing that the tempter might have tempted you and my labour might be lost.

But now Timothy has just arrived from Thessalonica, bringing good news of your faith and love. He tells us that you always think kindly of us, and are as anxious to see us as we are to see you. And so in all our difficulties and hardships your faith reassures us about you. It is the breath of life to us that you stand firm in the Lord. What thanks can we return to God for you? What thanks for all the joy you have brought us, making us rejoice before our God while we pray most earnestly night and day to be allowed to see you again and to mend your faith where it falls short?

This insight into the feelings of Paul helps us understand the heart of the loving God we serve. God wants us to be strong and faithful, filled with the fruits and gifts of the Holy Spirit. He wants our lives to be filled with joy and assurance. He wants the church to be a place of love and unity, of healing and restoration.

Biblical Models

There are many models employed in Scripture that teach us how to understand and relate to dropouts. Each model adds to our understanding of God's plan to restore backsliders.

The soils (Matt 13:3-8, 18-23)

Four kinds of soil are represented in the story commonly called "the parable of the sower": wayside soil, stony soil, soil

1 Thess 2:17-3:10 (NEB).
overgrown with thorns, and good soil. Both the stony soil and the soil overgrown with thorns are typical of marginal church members. Seeds sown in rocky places spring up quickly. But just as quickly, the young plants wilt when temptation, problems, and discouragement come along. The thorns represent the cares of life and the deceitfulness of riches that crowd in, taking away time and interest for the things of God. This parable encourages us to allow God's spirit to cultivate our lives and remove any foreign matter that would prevent us from growing up to be strong and fruitful in the work of God. God expects His people to bear fruit.

The vine (John 15:1-8)

God's expectations of His people are even more graphically seen in the parable of the vine. "I am the vine and my Father is the gardner. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit. . . ." ¹

When the branches fail to bear fruit, they are cut off, taken away and burned. Savage has described this as the "graceless" model because the unfruitful branches are summarily cut off and burned. This parable shows that God expects fruit and that we must remain in contact with Christ to produce that fruit.

The fruitless tree (Luke 13:6-9)

Grace is always available through God's love. A "grace period" is given to the fruitless fig tree in the hope that with a little more time, it may become fruitful.

¹John 15:1-2 (NIV).
And he told this parable: "A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came seeking fruit on it and found none. And he said to the vinedresser, 'Lo these three years I have come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and I find none. Cut it down; why should it use up the ground?' And he answered him, 'Let it alone, sir, this year also, till I dig about it and put on manure. And if it bears fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down.'"

Notice the reluctance of the vinedresser to take the drastic action of cutting down the unfruitful tree. If after another year it remains unfruitful, "you can cut it down." This parable demonstrates the persistence with which the Holy Spirit continues to work in the hearts of those who are not growing Christians and the reluctance of God to give up on anyone.

Perhaps those who revised the Seventh-Day Adventist Church Manual were taking this parable into consideration when they established a policy of waiting at least two years from the time a member's whereabouts become unknown before taking action to remove the name from the membership record.²

The wheat and tares (Matt 13:24-30)

The farmer sowed good seed in his field, but his enemy slipped in and sowed the seeds of a similar-looking weed. The field workers were alarmed when they saw the weeds growing among the wheat and asked if they should pull out the weeds. The farmer replied that both should grow together until the harvest and then be separated, the wheat being gathered into the barn and the weeds into piles to be burned.

Savage calls this the "full grace" model because grace extends to the unregenerate church member until the time of harvest. Some churches, such as the Catholic church, follow this model almost exclusively, so that once a person becomes a member, he or she is considered a member forever.

From this parable we see God's patience and the consideration He gives to the damage that might occur if unfaithful members were carelessly removed from the church family.

The lost coin (Luke 15:8-10)

In Luke 15 Jesus told three stories to illustrate God's response to the lost. The woman in the lost coin story had ten pieces of silver, no doubt her dowry of coins that had both monetary and sentimental value. When she lost one of the coins, she diligently searched her house, lit a candle, and swept the floor until she found it. There was great rejoicing among the neighboring women when the lost coin was recovered.

The coin was not aware of its being lost. Furthermore, it did not become lost through any fault of its own. The truth of this story is that it became lost in the house through the carelessness of the woman. It points out the painful fact that some people become inactive members through carelessness, indifference, unresolved conflicts, lack of love, or lack of assimilation and nurturing in the church. The words of Zech 13:6 apply more specifically to Christ, but may also bear sad witness to what can happen in the church: "And one shall say unto him, What
are these wounds in thine hands? Then he shall answer, Those with
which I was wounded in the house of my friends."

Often, little misunderstandings are allowed to grow, words
of criticism fester in sensitive hearts, and people with problems
are held at a distance. "Scorn has broken my heart and has left me
helpless; I looked for sympathy, but there was none, for comforters,
but I found none."¹

The parable of the lost coin teaches that the church has some
responsibility to bear when members drop out because of negligence.

What we have done over the years is to label the inactive member
as the bad one, the apostate. . . . But our research shows that
the congregation contributes to the dropout cycle. It's not a
lone activity; it takes both sides for it to occur.²

. . . there has been among us as a people a lack of deep,
earnest, soul-touching sympathy and love for the tempted and the
errant. . . . The newly converted soul often has fierce
conflicts with established habits or with some special form of
temptation, and, being overcome by some master passion or
tendency, he is guilty of indiscretion or actual wrong. It is
then that energy, tact, and wisdom are required of his brethren,
that he may be restored to spiritual health.³

The parable also teaches us that the primary effort in
"housecleaning" should be directed toward finding and recovering
the lost, rather than in removing those who stray.

The prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32)

The story of the prodigal son is really three stories in
one: the son who leaves home, falls to the depths of degredation,

¹Ps 69:20 (NIV).
²Savage, in Spangler, "Reactivating the Inactive Member,"
p. 5.
³White, Testimonies, 5:604, 605.
and then returns home very repentant; the father whose heart is broken by the loss of his son and who receives him back home with celebration; and the older brother who complains at the joyous welcome his prodigal brother receives when he returns home. The most moving part of the story is when the father's heart overflows with happiness and he says, "... this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found."¹

We often think of the prodigal as representing all sinners, "for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God."² Yet there is a very special lesson to be learned from this story that applies to dropouts. The son, after all, begins the story in the father's home and turns his back on it. He feels that home is too confining, that the world offers more adventure. Disdaining his father's love and the benefits of home, he turns to the world. A short time later he discovers that all is not well in the world, but it is too painful to lose face and return home, so he continues on with his menial existence. When at last he becomes desperate, he turns his steps back toward home. All along the way he rehearses his speech, planning to ask for a servant's job because he fears that his father will be angry with him. However, the father graciously forgives his wayward son and stands in sharp contrast to the elder son who is so selfish that he cannot rejoice for his brother. In reflecting upon the parable, we know that the unloving brother represents those of us who are sometimes unwilling

²Rom 3:23.
to forgive and receive again with full acceptance those who turned away from our fellowship. It is important to realize this in developing a caring ministry.

In my experience with inactive and former members, I have known many who express feelings like that of the prodigal son. So many have told me that even though they have not attended church for years, have not read their Bibles or kept the Sabbath, they felt guilty for breaking God's commandments and longed to return. But many felt there was no way open for them to come back. It is our privilege in the Caring Ministry to show them that not only will God forgive and accept them back but also that the church cares for them and wants to restore them to fellowship.

The one lost sheep (Luke 15:4-7)

Of all the Biblical models used to teach us about backsliding and restoration, this story reveals as no other the extent of God's love. It is a simple story of a shepherd who has a hundred sheep, but one strays. The shepherd goes out to the wilderness to search for the lost sheep and carries it home with rejoicing when he finds it.

In his Lab I training sessions of the "Skills for Calling and Caring Ministries," Savage tells how limited is the sheep's ability to see. If by careless nibbling of grass a sheep wanders away from the fold, it is unable to find its way back. When the lost sheep calls out to the flock, their responding "baa" helps the lost sheep know how to return. Should the flock not respond, the sheep is helpless to find its way home. Savage terms this the
church's response to the "cry for help." Savage also points out that it is illogical for the shepherd to "leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness" while searching for the one lost sheep, but that this illustrates God's extravagant love for the lost.

The Old Testament prophets used sheep to represent the lost condition of mankind. "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all." My people have been lost sheep; their shepherds have led them astray and caused them to roam on the mountains. They wandered over mountain and hill and forgot their own resting place.

Ellen White likewise used the illustration of the lost sheep to show how great is our need and to appeal for caring empathy toward the erring.

The sheep that has strayed from the fold is the most helpless of all creatures. It must be sought for; for it cannot find its way back. So with the soul that has wandered away from God; he is as helpless as the lost sheep; and unless divine love comes to his rescue, he can never find his way to God. Then with what compassion, what sorrow, what persistence, should the under-shepherd seek for lost souls! How willingly should he endure self-denial, hardship, privation!

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

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1 For further details of the cry for help, see "The Savage Model," pp. 76, 77 below.

2 Isa 53:6.

3 Jer 50:6 (NIV).

All Christians and all church members are called to be under-shepherds, following the example of the Chief Shepherd, Jesus Christ. Our love for those who wander and our willingness to search for them should be modeled after the example of Jesus Himself, who said, "... I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel."¹

We have considered seven Biblical models. Each of these models contributes to our knowledge of reversion and restoration, and together they give us a better understanding of God's perspective on backsliding. We have seen the consequences of separation from God. It is a serious thing to turn away from God's grace and the fellowship of His people. But in each of the models, the most important lesson comes from God's efforts to find and restore the lost. We are amazed at the patience and perseverance of God's love. The extent of that love was shown when Jesus Christ left the heavenly courts and came to this world in search of lost sinners.

Grace and the Dropout

Our study of backsliding from God's perspective would not be complete without addressing the topic of grace. If grace is God's unmerited favor, loving forgiveness and acceptance of sinners who have never known Him, what do we call it when He searches for, finds, and restores again those who once knew Him but carelessly turned their backs on Him? Again we call it "grace," but in so

¹Matt 15:24.
doing we realize that grace takes on an additional meaning in the
context of the restoration of backsliders.

Throughout the Old Testament we are reminded again and again
of how difficult it was for God to give up his rebellious people.

Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not
have compassion on the son of her womb? yea, they may forget,
yet will I not forget thee. Behold, I have graven thee upon the
palms of my hands; thy walls are continually before me.

When Israel was a child, then I loved him, and called my son
out of Egypt. . . . I taught Ephraim also to go, taking them by
their arms; but they knew not that I healed them. I drew them
with cords of a man, with bands of love.

And my people are bent to backsliding from me: though they
called them to the most High, none at all would exalt him. How
shall I give thee up, Ephraim? how shall I deliver thee, Israel
. . . ? O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself; but in me is
thine help.

Why was God so patient with Israel? Why did He put up with
their rebellion and lack of faith and still take them back, knowing
that they were prone to wander again? The answer is contained in
the words "... where sin abounded, grace did much more abound."

I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions,
and, as a cloud, thy sins: return unto me; for I have redeemed
thee.

Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him
while he is near: Let the wicked forsake his way, and the

1 Isa 49:15, 16.
2 Hos 11:1, 3, 4.
3 Hos 11:7, 8; 13:9.
4 Rom 5:20.
5 Isa 44:22.
unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.¹

Grace is not a static principle; it is an active force for redemption and restoration. Grace reaches out. Grace finds and forgives. Grace heals and restores. "The love of God still yearns over the one who has chosen to separate from Him, and He sets in operation influences to bring him back to the Father's house."²

In his book *Ministry to Inactives*, Knutson points out that the church must model grace as it relates to backsliders, rather than modeling works—"we will accept you if you do what we expect." Two quotations explain this important concept.

A concept of central significance in Christian theology is that of justification by faith. ... Even though we affirm and honor the doctrine of justification by faith, there has crept into Protestant practice the subtle—or not-so-subtle—idea that we are accepted for what we do rather than for who we are. The message still comes on loud and clear—the church is for "good people."³

The gospel enables us, through grace and forgiveness, to accept people where they are and to begin genuinely to care about them. It enables us to come in a non-threatening, non-judgmental manner and thus to model the gospel as well as to speak the gospel. The evangelist comes not as "good" to visit "bad" but as person to person, equal to equal, human being to human being, sinner to sinner. Such directness, equality, and genuine caring can be a marvelous vehicle for the gospel.⁴

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¹Isa 55:6, 7.
³Knutsen, p. 8.
⁴Ibid., p. 13.
The Caring Ministry must be built on the foundation of grace. God's gracious love must permeate our every effort to restore the inactive members. Our goal is not simply to "get 'em back to church," but to minister God's grace. We cannot mouth the words of God's grace while at the same time saying, "We will love you and accept you if you stop breaking the Sabbath and come back to church." We must love the inactive and former members even if they never come back to church! This is unrequited love; this is God's grace.

As we minister to backsliders, we may need to help them understand God's grace. Perhaps all they have ever known has been works and legalism. Maybe they have never grasped that salvation is a gift from God. We have gained nothing if their return to church only means coming again to the discouraging and unsuccessful search for self-righteousness. Their stay would be short-lived, and when the pain of defeat or the sting of criticism reached them, they would leave the church again. Only this time, they would have confirmed their former negative concepts of God, the church, and their salvation, and it would be doubly hard to ever again find entrance into their homes, let alone their trust and confidence.

The Church and Backsliding
How the Church Relates to Backsliders

How the church understands backsliding and relates to its inactive or former members is crucial to the Caring Ministry. Not everyone sees dropping out as bad. David Still somewhat facetiously wrote:
Perhaps someday an ambitious researcher will discover that institutions fill up with persons just as buckets fill up with water. If he should do so, then it will be obvious that a Christian congregation which has reached its capacity must "spill out" one old member for every new member who enters.¹

Robert Hudnut believes having dropouts is a sign of a healthy and growing church.

It is a tough time for the American church. In many quarters membership is down. Attendance is down. But church growth is not the point. The point is whether the church is being true to the Gospel. And in city after city and town after town, it is. Indeed, because it is being faithful it is often losing members. . . .

People are leaving the church. It could not be a better sign. . . . In most churches, the first third are committed, the second third are peripheral, and the third third are out.²

Not many Seventh-day Adventists would look at dropouts with such a cold eye. My search of Adventist writings on the topic of backsliding shows that there is great concern over those who dropped out of the church.³ Mingled with this concern was a frustration that sometimes expressed itself in searching for a place to put the blame. A. J. Meikeljohn called upon the pastors to "... acknowledge the truth of the statement that we as ministers are largely to blame for this situation."⁴ Others


³Ministry magazine has frequently published articles on apostasy and church membership. Two series were run in 1951 and 1953. An index containing a complete list is available in most SDA college libraries. See also pp. 281-286 of Louis Nielsen's dissertation for a chronologically arranged list of articles from the Review & Herald.

called for resolutions proclaiming the church's desire for the former members to return. To this T. E. Unruh retorted:

The missing cannot be "resolved" back into the Sabbath School or church fellowship. They must be searched out and found by those whose hearts are aflame with the love of God.¹

In the same article Elder Unruh voiced his concern that some churches wanted to drop the inactive members for the benefit of the church.

We hesitate to confess that on the local church level, leadership often looks upon the missing as so many names to be dropped in order that church goals may be lowered.²

Our churches have often been inconsistent in dealing with backsliders—harsh with some, lenient with others.

Active members seem to tolerate sin in the life of less faithful members in proportion to attendance. Sin is judged harshly when one's attendance is poor but is viewed with less contempt as attendance increases. On the other hand, "goodness" is seen primarily as good attendance.³

One of the worst things a church can do is to simply ignore dropouts.

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 brother's 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 Saviour.⁴

²Ibid.
⁴Werning, Vision and Strategy for Church Growth, p. 68.
Lee's survey of former Adventists showed that 60 percent had never been visited during or after the period they stopped practicing the Adventist faith.1 Nielsen reported an almost identical 61.4 percent who said that no one, including pastors, elders, deacons, teachers, friends, or relatives had called them in an effort to bring them back to the church.2 George Ault summarized the anger-punish cycle this way:

They leave because they are angry.
We are angry because they left.
We punish them by letting them sit in their pain.
They punish us by not coming back.3

The Apostle Paul called for the Corinthian church not to be indifferent to the sin in their midst.4 Today he would also appeal to us not to be apathetic toward the inactive members.5 We must not allow ourselves to accept inactivity as the norm.

... the modern church member has been conditioned to accept the fact of inactive members as being a part of the normal church experience. To be inactive has become respectable in the minds of many.6

1Lee, p. 101.
2Nielsen, p. 143
3George A. Ault, "Developing a Ministry to Marginal Members of Zion United Church of Christ" (D.Min. project report, Drew University, 1982), p. 21.
41 Cor 5:1-7.
5Gal 6:1,2.
6Edward Miller, "Inactive Church Member Reclamation Emphasis" (D.Min. project report, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1977), p. 34.
... both active and inactive church members view inactivity too lightly. Ministry revealed that neither group realized the real damage of inactivity. It is viewed more as a neutral nuisance. Church discipline must be employed to confront both actives and inactives with the fact that inactivity damages the church.  

God holds the church responsible for nurturing young Christians and for caring for those who drift away.

We must expect to meet and bear with great imperfections in those who are young and inexperienced. Christ has bidden us seek to restore such in the spirit of meekness, and He holds us responsible for pursuing a course which will drive them to discouragement, despair, and ruin. Unless we daily cultivate the precious plant of love we are in danger of becoming narrow, unsympathetic, bigoted, and critical, esteeming ourselves righteous when we are far from being approved of God.

The responsibility of caring for inactive members rests on the whole church family. “So it happens that if one member suffers all other members suffer with it, and if one member is honored all the members share a common joy.”

Strong words of warning and admonition have been given to pastors and spiritual leaders in the church:

... Thus saith the Lord God unto the shepherds; Woe be to the shepherds of Israel that do feed themselves! should not the shepherds feed the flocks?

The diseased have ye not strengthened, neither have ye healed that which was sick, neither have ye bound up that which was broken, neither have ye brought again that which was driven away, neither have ye sought that which was lost. . . .

My sheep wandered through all the mountains, and upon every high hill: yea, my flock was scattered upon all the face of the earth, and none did search or seek after them.

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1Elam, p. 90.

2White, Testimonies, 5:605.

31 Cor 12:26 (Phillips).
Thus saith the Lord God; Behold, I am against the shepherds; and I will require my flock at their hand, and cause them to cease from feeding the flock; neither shall the shepherds feed themselves any more; for I will deliver my flock from their mouth, that they may not be meat for them.

For thus saith the Lord God; Behold, I, even I, will both search my sheep, and seek them out. As a shepherd seeketh out his flock in the day that he is among his sheep that are scattered; so will I seek out my sheep, and will deliver them out of all places where they have been scattered in the cloudy and dark day.

I will feed my flock, and I will cause them to lie down, saith the Lord God. I will seek that which was lost, and bring again that which was driven away, and will bind up that which was broken, and will strengthen that which was sick: . . . Therefore will I save my flock.¹

The church must reexamine the way in which it relates to the inactive and former members, to fulfill the responsibility placed on it by God, and to do so in the most loving and caring way. The Caring Ministry has adopted these words of the Apostle Paul as the motto for this ministry:

Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted. Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.²

The Savage Model

Dr. John Savage is a minister in the United Methodist Church. He is also a trained psychotherapist and is the founder and president of LEAD Consultants, an organization in Ohio that designs and conducts workshops in church renewal, management,

¹Ezek 34:2,4,6,10,12,15,16,22.
²Gal 6:1,2.
conflict resolution, and communication skills. The work for which Savage is best known is his research in encountering the apathetic and bored church member.

This research was the basis for his doctoral dissertation and, in turn, led to the publication of his book, *The Apathetic and Bored Church Member*. As interest and demand for this knowledge grew, Savage developed two seminars. Lab I is called "Skills for Calling and Caring Ministries" and is a 36-hour training program for lay leaders and pastors, teaching them the basic concepts and skills for ministry to inactive church members. Lab II is an intensive training seminar for experienced Lab I graduates who want to conduct their own labs. It includes leadership skills, lab organization, and advanced training in the concepts and communication skills needed for ministry to inactive members.

The "Caring Ministry" is the title we have given to the Stone Tower Church program for reclaiming inactive members. The purpose of this project was to test the effectiveness of Savage's model in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. It would be impossible to include in this project report all the concepts, methods, and skills used in the Caring Ministry. The major contributions of the Savage model are touched on here, though they are not presented in the sequence in which they are used in the Caring Ministry seminar. Portions of the concepts and skills appear throughout this work, following the order that seems best for this presentation.
For Savage, it all began in 1973 when he was looking through a box of slides taken of his church members only a few years before. He noticed that a large number of them had already become inactive. Realizing that many of these dropouts had been church leaders only four years earlier, Savage began to wonder what had happened to these persons? What were the causes of inactivity? What could the church do to prevent dropouts? How could he minister to these inactive members?

A program was soon set up that involved four United Methodist Churches. Thirteen Methodist clergymen were invited to join Savage in interviewing a total of 101 active and inactive members. Prior to the interviews, a brief 6-hour training session explained the program and its organization and touched on some of the concepts and skills the pastors would need.

The data the pastors collected in the interviews formed the basis for understanding that persons move through a series of stages when going from active to inactive participation in the church. Savage calls this the "dropout track."¹

Moving away from active involvement in the life of the church usually begins through a cluster of anxiety-provoking events (which Savage calls "APE"). These events may happen in the life circumstances of the person or in his or her church relationships. Savage has categorized them according to the following arrangement:

¹A tape of John Savage's lecture on the dropout track is available from LEAD Consultants, PO Box 644, Reynoldsburg, OH 43068.
Life Events:
1. Reality anxiety—real events such as illness, accident
2. Moral anxiety—not living up to beliefs, standards
3. Neurotic anxiety—not based in reality, unrealistic expectations
4. Existential anxiety—loss of meaning, or life-threatening events.

Church Events:
1. Intra-family conflict—within the member's family
2. Conflict with the pastor—personality clash, unfulfilled expectations, etc.
3. Inter-family conflict—friction between church families, individuals
4. Overwork—too many responsibilities, lack of support or appreciation.

Anxiety can be helpful when it is an early warning system prompting change, but it can be destructive when it produces instability and causes a person’s life or faith to collapse. People experiencing anxiety give off signals which sensitive persons about them may recognize as “cries for help.” The cry for help may be expressed verbally (“it's no use,” “no one cares anymore,” “it's my fault,” etc.) or non-verbally (coming late, not participating, not accepting office, etc.). It may be subtle or overt and is very often given outside the awareness.

The church needs to be more sensitive to the cries for help. Often we hear them as criticisms and we become defensive or criticize back. We take the person's words at face value and fail to hear the deeper message. We are busy or involved with our own
concerns. We do not want to hear another's problems or criticisms. We often screen out these persons, hoping that the problem will go away or that someone else will help. But Savage insists that in so doing we have missed our opportunity for caring by not responding to the cries for help.

In its initial stages, the anxiety is indicated by verbal signs such as: "it's too much," "it's no use," "I can't take it anymore," "I give up," "nobody cares anymore," etc. Such phrases indicate a person is quite anxious and moving away from the church. If these signals are not picked up and no one helps resolve the anxiety, the individual becomes angry. When the anger develops, the individual shows more agitated behavior, becoming more aggressive or withdrawn, either striking out at an individual or the institution or becoming depressed and blaming one's self for what has happened.1

Unresolved anxiety leads to anger and withdrawal in an attempt to return to comfort and balance. Church members can then expect to hear stronger criticism and see more sporadic attendance. Richard Vangerid explains it this way:

Withdrawal from corporate worship in most cases seemed to be a coping device designed to reestablish a new balance in the family constellation. There had been some painful stress from loss and change which resulted in some personal and/or familial disequilibrium. In some cases there was adaptation-seeking withdrawal from other social contacts as well. In a few cases the withdrawal seemed to be a final cry for help. There seemed to be little understanding of these efforts. One man said, "It is a small thing but when we became inactive no one noticed us."2

At this point members who are experiencing unresolved anxiety begin to move down one of two tracks away from the church. Evidence of this process can be seen by less frequent attendance at worship, a drop in participation in activities, offices or group functions, and/or decreased giving. Savage labels as "skunks"

1Savage, The Apathetic and Bored Church Member, p. 57.
2Vangerid, p. 17.
those who direct blame externally, and "turtles" those who tend to blame themselves. "Turtles" tend to withdraw more quietly than "skunks," so quietly in fact that the church is often unaware of their absence. The dropouts reinvest their time, energy and money either in their family or in other organizations.

The church member's typical reaction is to assume that these persons have lost their faith and are now "backsliders." Seldom does the church or its leaders expend the effort to find out why the members have dropped out or invite them to return.

Each of the 23 persons interviewed in the non-active group indicated that no one from the church had ever come to find out why they were losing interest or had dropped out. It reinforced their belief that no one cared, and that they were not missed. One third of this group cried during the interview, indicating the intensity of unresolved feelings.¹

Eventually dropouts seal off their pain and totally reinvest their energies. Callers from the church hear statements of indifference, apathy, or denial and may conclude that nothing more can be done. At some point the inactive member's name will be presented before a church business meeting with the report of total noninterest, and the membership will be dropped. Thus it is that the church unintentionally lets this person sit in pain and isolation. We fail to offer the ministry of listening and caring and so do not restore those who might be reclaimed for Christ and the Church.

The startling discovery from Savage's research is that many dropouts still profess belief and some attempt to practice all or part of the church's teachings in their private lives.

¹Savage, The Apathetic and Bored Church Member, p. 57.
In several of the interviews it was noted that the C groups [the inactives] reported they saw themselves as active Christians, but the locale of their operation was no longer within the institutional church. These persons still maintain a Christian perspective in their life, although much of the religious piety drops away, i.e., their religious language, the use of the Scriptures, and using their faith to help make decisions. . . . Because they have been hurt and made anxious by the persons within the institution, they move away from the church but do not seem to give up the central notion of being a Christian witness to the world. Their faith orientation shifts from serving the institutional church to serving persons outside of the institution. At least 50% of them still see themselves as servants of God.

All the available studies of former Adventists indicated the same phenomenon. To cite an example, Lee reported:

In completing this analysis, it became obvious that those individuals who the churches had designated missing and apostate might not necessarily classify themselves that way. . . . Fully 37% of those who are classified by churches in the missing and apostate group claim to be practicing the Seventh-day Adventist faith.

Having discovered that dropouts often retain belief in the teachings of Scripture and the Church, Savage further concluded that theological disagreement was seldom the basis for leaving the church.

Anxiety levels are precipitated primarily by rational problems and not theological ones. There were no significant differences between the active or inactive members regarding theological issues. This implies that persons did not leave the church because of conflict over diverse theological matters.

1Ibid., p. 60.
2Lee, p. 70.
3Savage, The Apathetic and Bored Church Member, p. 59.
Some Seventh-day Adventists may have difficulty accepting this conclusion because one of the first signs of apostasy from the Adventist church is often an external activity contrary to church teaching: Sabbath breaking, wearing jewelry, smoking or drinking, etc. However, these actions might be better understood as non-verbal cries for help, as a way to establish or protect one's separate identity. Very often the inactive or former member feels very guilty because there is an incompatibility between the beliefs retained deep inside and the lifestyle he or she is living.

To balance this finding by Savage that most dropouts still believe the teachings of the Church, it should be pointed out that there are a number of people who drop out of the Seventh-day Adventist Church because of conflict regarding doctrine. The issues recently raised by Walter Rea, Desmond Ford, and others have prompted some members to withdraw from the church because of theological conflict. Members of the Caring Ministry team would be advised to be sensitive to this possibility when calling on inactive or former members.

The Savage model helps the church understand that the dropout experience is not a total mystery and that there is opportunity to intervene before it becomes too late. Even after persons have dropped out of the church, there is still hope that through patience and persistence, love and understanding, many dropouts will be reclaimed.
In his Lab I and II lectures, Savage often states that 50 percent of those who return to church will do so after only one visit. The other 50 percent who eventually return will need, on average, one visit for each year they have been out of the church.\(^1\)

The only question that remains before the church then is this: Is it willing to put forth the effort to carefully and prayerfully engage in ministry to inactive members? Is it willing to take the risk of hearing pain and criticism in order that we may heal wounded hearts?

The Necessity for a Trained Laity

As the church comes to realize not only the responsibility but also the opportunity for ministry to inactive and former members, we are suddenly seized by the magnitude of the challenge before us.

Take Stone Tower Church as an example. We have already indicated that 27 percent of its membership, or 134 persons, are resident inactive members who need encouragement, caring, and involvement. But this is only the beginning. The Oregon Conference leadership has repeatedly postulated that there are as many former Seventh-day Adventists living in the Portland area as there are current members. If this is true, we could expect upwards of 7,000 former Adventists living in our neighborhoods, shopping and working in the same places as do the active members. \(^1\)

\(^{1}\)Savage, in Spangler, "Reactivating the Inactive Member," p. 27.
Ministry to dropouts is a tremendous evangelistic opportunity, but at the same time, it almost overwhelms us with the sheer numbers of people who need close contact with those who will listen to them, help them through their doubts, and reintroduce them to Christ and a vibrant and fulfilling relationship in the church.

The inevitable conclusion is this: pastors cannot do this work alone, and thank God they cannot! It was never His design that the pastors should be the only ones involved in ministry. Ministry is a function of the entire church.

Upon returning to heaven, Christ sent the Holy Spirit to His church. The Holy Spirit was to guide, teach, comfort, and fill His church with the fruits of the indwelling Spirit of Christ. The Holy Spirit gave the members power to accomplish the mission given them by Jesus Christ to fill the whole world with the good news of salvation.¹

But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.²

God does not send His people out to accomplish a task for which He has not prepared them. The Holy Spirit also gave gifts to each member to be used in service.

¹There are many good books available from writers in the church-growth field dealing with the ministry of the members. For a good Seventh-day Adventist book on this topic, see Rex Edwards, A New Frontier—Every Believer a Minister (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press, 1979).

²Acts 1:8.
And these were his gifts: some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip God's people for work in his service, to the building up of the body of Christ.¹

The Caring Ministry must be a team effort with pastors and lay members working side by side. Savage recognized this principle.

In most congregations, apathetic and bored members number about one third of their memberships. It is not feasible for the pastor to make contact with all these persons. Therefore, the role of the laity in this kind of calling is crucial to the effectiveness of a visitation evangelism program.²

The effort to recruit members to help in church visitation programs is not new. Thirty years ago, Elder J. R. Spangler suggested that the church be divided into districts and that elders and other leaders visit the backsliders in each area.³ More recently, George Knowles suggested a similar plan of visitation through assignment of territories.⁴

Schaller is adamant that callers need prior training. He said, "No one should go out to call until after first being trained in effective listening or 'active listening' skills."⁵ This is

¹Eph 4:11,12 (NEB).
²Savage, The Apathetic and Bored Church Member, p. 79.
not to say that untrained church members should not respond to the opportunities open for them to befriend and care for inactive or former members. But every church should have a group of people who are sensitive to the unique needs of inactive members. This group should be trained in communication skills so that they know how to listen and facilitate the openness and trust levels that inactive members need to resolve the anxieties, think through the doubts, and heal the wounds from their previous experiences.

Though this work is sensitive and often confidential, and though it requires a high level of spirituality and ability to empathize with people, laymen are capable of doing effective ministry. In fact, there may be times when the lay member will be more effective than the pastor, especially if the problem that caused the inactive member to drop out was conflict with the pastor.

Savage sees no difference in the ability of pastors or lay members to be effective callers; dropouts will respond to either, or to anyone from the church who shows genuine caring.

I cannot emphasize enough the importance of training laity. I do not believe that the clergy-person in any congregation can sufficiently do the task needed without lay help. This not only involves the concept of effective use of laypeople in the church, but it also has direct implication that all members of the Christian Church are ministers and have certain pastoral functions to perform for each other. A distinctive element in the research was the feeling of abandonment on the part of the apathetic and bored members when no one from the church made any attempt to contact them. My experience indicates that many of them would have responded with eagerness if someone in the parish had shown concern. I remember one interviewee's saying to me, "I have not been active in my church for ten years, and no one has ever asked me why." This individual did not indicate
whether that person should have been the pastor or a layperson. The only thing she was concerned about was whether members of the church cared.¹

Schaller calls for the church to establish a system to recognize and respond to the "cries for help" from those who are dropping out.

Therefore it is very important that (a) every congregation have some system for identifying the early signals sent to the church by the potentially inactive members and (b) a system for quickly responding to these signals, such as a cadre of trained callers who regularly make listening calls.²

The Caring Ministry model is built on this concept: ministry to inactive and former members will be most effective when it is carried out by pastor-enablers and trained laity who cooperate together in the learning experience, in visitation, and in a mutual support system.

A New Vision for Ministry to Inactive Members

There is evidence that the Seventh-day Adventist church is keenly aware of the losses from its membership and the high percentage of inactive members within its family. Our concern for the inactive and former members is not negative "scapegoating"; rather it is a healthy sign of a church becoming aware of the need for a systematic and genuine ministry of loving people and listening to them.

¹Savage, The Apathetic and Bored Church Member, p. 79.
²Schaller, Assimilating New Members, pp. 119, 120.
It is not yet too late to redeem the neglects of the past. Let there be a revival of the first love, the first ardor. Search out the ones you have driven away, bind up by confession the wounds you have made. Come close to the great Heart of pitying love, and let the current of that divine compassion flow into your heart and from you to the hearts of others. Let the tenderness and mercy that Jesus has revealed in His own precious life be an example to us of the manner in which we should treat our fellow beings, especially those who are our brethren in Christ. Many have fainted and become discouraged in the great struggle of life, whom one word of kindly cheer and courage would have strengthened to overcome. Never, never become heartless, cold, unsympathetic, and censorious. Never lose an opportunity to say a word to encourage and inspire hope. We cannot tell how far-reaching may be our tender words of kindness, our Christlike efforts to lighten some burden. The erring can be restored in no other way than in the spirit of meekness, gentleness, and tender love.¹

This ministry follows closely in the footsteps of Jesus.

Nathan C. Brooks, Jr., said,

In the ministry of visitation, the Christian most nearly approaches the exact work and method employed by Christ himself. It is in personal visitation that the Christian finds himself, loses himself, and gives himself in the most unselfish way to doing the will of God.²

¹White, Testimonies, 5:612, 613.

CHAPTER III

IMPLEMENTATION

Preparation

Developing a Caring Attitude in the Church

The place to begin implementing the Caring Ministry is not with visitation or even training. It starts with creating an awareness and a sense of caring in the church. "A pastor's first responsibility should be to build up a spirit of genuine concern among all members of the congregation."\(^1\) This does not mean that we approach the congregation with the blanket assumption that the whole church is cold and unfeeling. To do this would be to launch the reclaiming ministry from a negative or critical perspective and run the risk of making the church members defensive and less receptive to this special ministry or to the inactive members who return to the church.

However, many members in the church who are satisfied, fulfilled, and involved have difficulty understanding the feelings and experiences of those who drop out. Savage expressed it this way:


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The "in" (active) group was not sensitive to the needs of those persons who were aching and leaving the church. That is why 100% of the C group could say, "No one ever came to visit me." The implication of that statement is that the A group did not sense the needs of those persons who were drifting away; who were, in fact, crying for help. The active member did not come to their aid. One of the major functions of this research is to sensitize the A group to the needs of the B and C groups, for each has a ministry to the other.1

Ever so subtly, without our realizing it, a Laodicean attitude can creep into the church: "I am rich in knowledge, satisfied with my church and have need of nothing. If you have problems, well, that's too bad." But Ellen White tells us that "Angels pity these wandering ones. Angels weep, while human eyes are dry and hearts are closed to pity."2

An uncaring attitude can affect even the ministers. Pastors have plenty to do just keeping the machinery of the church running while trying to find some time for evangelism. They may be inclined to feel that there is no time for listening to the complaints of backsliders who "ought to know better," but God considers this work an essential part of their ministry.

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. Some are so nearly asleep that they seem to have no sense of the work of a gospel minister. They do not consider that as spiritual physicians they are required to have skill in administering to souls diseased with sin. The work of warning sinners, of weeping over them and pleading with them, has been neglected until many souls are past all cure.3

1Savage, The Apathetic and Bored Church Member, p. 61. See page 96 below for an explanation of these groups.
2White, Christ's Object Lessons, p. 192.
3White, Testimonies, 2:506.
Our approach to inactive members cannot be based on a sense of duty or because we feel bad that our church membership and attendance have dropped. John S. Paschal said:

If ministry is initiated simply because this is what seems best or because the church is losing members, financial support, etc., then there is a question as to whether or not this ministry should be initiated at all.¹

Inactive or former members will be amazingly perceptive to the motives that prompt our interest in them. Again we return to Paschal for this observation.

Not only will my pretending to be something other than what I am hinder my ministry and my relationship with others, but pretending to care when I don't will eventually be evident to those to whom I seek to minister. It is almost impossible to fake an attitude of caring and concern.²

In the early days of the Adventist church, Ellen White recorded an incident where some of the brethren were cold and uncaring toward those who struggled with spiritual problems. She, on the other hand, felt a great concern for those who left the church.

In laboring with the erring, some of our brethren had been too rigid, too cutting in remarks. And when some were disposed to reject their counsel, and separate from them, they would say, "Well, if they want to go off, let them go." While such a lack of the compassion and long-suffering and tenderness of Jesus was manifested by His professed followers, these poor, erring inexperienced souls, buffeted by Satan, were certain to make shipwreck of faith. However great may be the wrongs and sins of the erring, our brethren must learn to manifest not only the tenderness of the Great Shepherd, but also His undying care and love for the poor, straying sheep. Our ministers toil and lecture week after week, and rejoice that a few souls embrace

¹John S. Paschal, "Equipping the Laity for a Caring Ministry to Estranged Church Members" (D.Min. project report, Drew University, 1981), p. 86.

²Ibid., p. 69.
the truth; and yet brethren of a prompt, decided turn of mind may, in five minutes, destroy their work by indulging the feelings which prompt words like these: "Well, if they want to leave us, let them go."

Fortunately, not every Adventist church is as uncaring as this. Stone Tower Church most certainly is not. On the contrary, many of Stone Tower's members were deeply concerned over the losses of the past few years. They grieved for their friends and relatives whose names had been dropped from membership or who had become inactive. Our goal during this stage of the project was to build upon this sense of concern and to develop an understanding of and genuine caring for the inactive members.

The method I chose to use in enhancing a caring attitude in Stone Tower Church was to preach three sermons on various aspects of ministry to inactive members. The goal for these sermons was (1) to help the members understand the feelings and experience of those who drop out, (2) to create a desire in their hearts to do something positive for the inactive members, and (3) to prepare the way for acceptance of and fellowship with returning members.

The first sermon was entitled "Strangers." This sermon was intended to help members understand what it is like to feel alone and how a lack of fellowship and sense of belonging makes it easy

for people to drift away from the church. With this in mind, and realizing that many long-time members cannot remember that feeling, I did something very uncharacteristic of my usual pastoral style. At the beginning of the sermon I asked the congregation to gather Bibles, purses, etc., to stand up, and then to find another place to sit in the church at least three rows from their previous location, and not with any family or friends. Pandemonium broke out as everyone headed for the aisles at the same time. When at last they were seated again, they looked like a whole different congregation, for no one was sitting in his usual place surrounded by family or close friends.

The sermon told about the experience of Israel as strangers in Egypt and about the feelings of new believers in the early Christian church. The main body of the sermon stressed the need for fellowship, caring, and brotherly love. Some specific applications were given, such as an awareness of the feelings of guests, a willingness to initiate conversations with people we do not know, and a concern for those who miss the Sabbath services. We closed by singing "Blest be the tie that binds our hearts in Christian love."

Stone Tower Church has a unique situation that calls for continual awareness of the need for fellowship. The sanctuary was built as an evangelistic center and seats 1,000. We do not use the balcony (which seats 400) for the Sabbath services. Since the main floor seats 600 and attendance averages 270 to 300, there is a lot of vacant space. People tend to be separated from each other and to be a long distance from the pulpit. Only through a conscious effort to build a sense of fellowship and involvement can we overcome these obstacles and create the warmth and closeness our church family needs.
Apparently this sermon will go in the record books as my most-remembered sermon. Months later people are still commenting on how sitting alone in the church gave them an entirely new understanding of the loneliness of others and the need for fellowship.

The second sermon, entitled "The Lost Silver Coin," was based on the parable in Luke 15. It focused attention on the possibility of a church member's being lost through neglect, either theirs or the church's, the value of the lost member, and the joy that would come when the member was restored. The congregation was told about the Caring Ministry program and about the homecoming month. The sermon closed with my appeal that they pray for the inactive members and be willing to let God use them as instruments of His love and caring.

The final sermon was intended to help the members understand how people feel when they drop out of the church and to build in the members a belief that dropouts can and will be restored. Using the title "The Ministry of Reconciliation," I preached the story of John Mark. When Paul and Barnabas began their missionary journey, John Mark eagerly went with them; but discouragement soon set in, and Mark left them and returned home. Apparently Paul was disgusted with Mark and would not allow him on the next journey. Using this example, along with the story of Pliable from Pilgrim's Progress and the parable of the stony ground, I talked about the feelings of failure which dropouts may experience. The sermon and the series concluded with the willingness of Barnabas to give John

\[\text{1See Acts 13:2-13; 15:36-41; 2 Tim 4:11.}\]
Mark a second chance and how in the end Paul accepted Mark as "profitable to me for the ministry." The appeal was based on Gal 6:1, 2: "Ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness."

The effect of these sermons was evident in several ways. The members were more willing to greet those they did not know. People lingered longer in the foyer and hallways. The topic of fellowship came up in casual conversations and in board and committee meetings. Almost everyone invited to attend the Caring Ministry seminar accepted and became involved in the program.

Without such a caring attitude, a church tends to ignore inactive members. At times members may be critical of them or of the pastors who baptized them. Once members come to understand the struggles, anxieties, doubts, and feelings of failure that dropouts experience, they have a softer, more loving attitude and are more willing to put forth the effort to reclaim them. Without this caring attitude, returning dropouts would find a cold and unfeeling church that would keep them at a distance and refuse them the acceptance and involvement they need. It would only be a matter of time until they dropped out again.

The love of Jesus makes the difference. "We love him, because he first loved us." Realizing how much He loves us and loves the backslider too, we are freed from indifference, apathy, or

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1 Tim 4:11.

2 John 4:19.
self-righteousness and filled with a loving concern for our brothers and sisters who have separated themselves from the fellowship of God's family.

. . . 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.¹

If you are in communion with Christ, you will place His estimate upon every human being. You will feel for others the same deep love that Christ has felt for you. Then you will be able to win, not drive, to attract, not repulse, those for whom He died. None would ever have been brought back to God if Christ had not made a personal effort for them; and it is by this personal work that we can rescue souls.²

Identifying Inactive Members

Several months before the Caring Ministry seminar took place, we began identifying inactive members. Attendance patterns, involvement in church activity, attitudes revealed in conversation, etc., formed the basis for this system of member identification.

Before proceeding to spell out how this identification was done, it may be important to clarify that inactive members were not placed on a second membership list. The Church Manual forbids such a practice.

Each church should have but one membership list. Under no circumstances should the practice of keeping a retired list be followed.³ The church roll should contain the names of all members.

¹White, Testimonies, 3:188.
²White, Christ's Object Lessons, p. 197.
³Church Manual, p. 72.
Furthermore, the list of inactive members was not made public information. Some persons might misunderstand, thinking that inactives were being singled out as "bad" members. Inactive members should never be made to feel subordinate or inferior. The only reason for setting up a system of membership categories is to facilitate visitation and to monitor response. The Scriptures tell us, "Be sure you know the condition of your flocks, give careful attention to your herds."  

There are a number of systems that might be used to identify inactive members. Peter Wagner uses a nine-point system that starts with those closest to the church and ends with those furthest away:

1. Active members who are strong.
2. Active members who are weak.
3. Active members who are not born again.
4. Inactive resident members.
5. Non-resident members.
7. Non-members with church background who are indifferent.
8. Non-members with church background who are hostile.
9. Non-members with no church background (the "pagan pool").

Oosterwal's system is more simplified.

1. Attend Always.
2. Seldom Absent (attend more than 90 percent).
3. Attend Not Regularly (50-90 percent).
4. Attend Occasionally (10-50 percent).
5. Attend Seldom (less than 10 percent).
6. Attend Never.

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1Prov 27:23 (NIV).
3Oosterwal, Patterns of SDA Church Growth in America, p. 29.
Savage divides his members into three categories—active, less active, and inactive.

A. Active Member
1. Attends church worship at least 75 percent of the time.
2. Participates in one or more institutional groups of the church.
3. Makes a pledge and pays at least 80 percent.
4. Holds a positive attitude toward the life of the church.
5. Can articulate the faith.

B. Less Active Member
1. 25 percent decrease in attendance at church worship.
2. Decreased participation in church groups.
3. Reduced pledging.
4. Hostile attitude toward the church.
5. Little or no prayer or pious behavior.

C. The Dropout
1. No attendance at worship.
2. No participation in groups.
3. No pledging.
4. Hostile or indifferent attitude toward church.
5. Can articulate faith and pious behavior returns.1

Our purpose for inactive member identification in the Caring Ministry was not to set up an elaborate system that required a lot of time or precise definitions of the member's activity and attitude. We elected to establish a system that was simple and easy to use, but that also gave us the information we needed. It is as follows:

A - Active Members
A1 Members who are active and involved (attend 75+%, involved in groups, positive attitude).
A2 Spiritually active, but physically unable to attend or be involved.
A3 Spiritually active non-residents.

B - Less Active Members
Attend services 10-75%; decreasing or little involvement; indifferent/critical/hostile attitude.

C - Inactive Members

C^1 Inactive resident members (attend 0-10%).
C^2 Inactive non-resident members.
C^3 Presumed to be inactive—whereabouts unknown.

Attendance at worship and other church activities is a primary factor in determining membership category. Attendance should not be given too much emphasis, but it is an important indicator of what is happening in the spiritual life of the member. Savage says, "Worship attendance is the first behavioral indicator of dropout and is one of the most sensitive indicators of what is happening to the parishioner."^1 Nielsen adds,

It is not always possible to distinguish whether nonattendance is a symptom or the problem itself, but it is always an important warning signal that the person is on his/her way out of the church.^2

The importance of attendance is not the continued attendance or non-attendance. The indicator to watch for is change in attendance. Increased or decreased attendance often signals that something important is taking place within the member's life.

At this point Knutson reminds us of what we have previously said about grace as it applies to the dropout.

It is tempting to segregate people in groups—which is in essence what the congregation does when it talks about "active" and "inactive" members. The dividing is usually based solely upon attendance at worship, the giving of money, and attendance at Holy Communion. Persons are therefore informed subtly (or not so subtly) that they "pay" for active membership, either by attending communion or by giving a donation. When they have fallen from grace into inactive membership they are made to feel that they must earn their way back by paying the price (by attending and contributing). Holy Communion and worship,

^1Savage, The Apathetic and Bored Church Member, p. 57.

^2Nielsen, p. 174.
intended to be grace experiences, become instead instruments of the Law. Thus, techniques of proclaiming the gospel actually turn the gospel into "law" because they have not been tempered with the ministry of caring and understanding.¹

Let me emphasize, then, that the placing of members into categories is not determining who is "good" and who is "bad." It is not an evaluation of spirituality based on works (attendance, giving, etc.). It is only a tool to help the pastors and Caring Ministry team be more sensitive to the needs of the members. Sometimes other known information about a member affects the placement; but again, this is not a subjective judgment of a member's relation to God. It is our attempt to bring together all the known factors of the member's patterns in church life so that we may more effectively minister to his or her needs.

Attendance is determined in two ways. Every Sabbath the "Friendship Folder" is passed down the pew. Attention is called to this instrument, and both members and guests are invited to sign it and indicate any way in which the pastoral staff or church officers may be of service. There are always a few people who are not in the sanctuary when the Friendship Folders are passed or who choose not to sign them. Because of this possibility, we pastors have trained ourselves to scan the congregation both when in the sanctuary and before and after services. We simply file away in our memories who is present and who is absent. This information is used later to fill in the names of those who did not sign the record. This practice has not turned us into computers nor made us

¹Knutson, p. 9.
feel like monitors checking attendance. It has, however, helped us become keenly aware of those who may need pastoral attention, and we are able to quickly respond to this need.

Prior to the Caring Ministry seminars, we began keeping record of attendance and gathering other data which would help us place the members in appropriate categories. After a period of three months, and in consultation with others who knew the congregation well, we set up the categories. The breakdown of our membership at the beginning of this project (April 27, 1983) was as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Number of Members</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Active</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A(^1)</td>
<td>224</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A(^2)</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A(^3)</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>271</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less Active</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inactive</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C(^1)</td>
<td>136</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C(^2)</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C(^3)</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>196</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>497</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The visitation which took place after the Caring Ministry seminars focused on the B and C\(^1\) members, who comprised 33 percent of our congregation.

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\(^1\)This does not take into consideration 45 deaf members who are pastored by Elder Rex Rolls, a retired minister. The deaf group was not a part of this study.
Selecting and Interviewing the Callers

One of the goals for this project was to select and train a group of lay persons who would be capable of participating in a systematic visitation ministry to inactive church members.

Previous experience in the Caring Ministry program with the Bellflower-Lakewood Church in Southern California taught us that the dynamics of the seminar are best when the group size is between eighteen and thirty-six persons (and in multiples of six). For the Stone Tower project, we decided to conduct two seminars, hoping to train fifty or more local members in addition to others who might join us from neighboring churches.

Experience had also taught us that it is best to hand-select the participants rather than to offer a general invitation. Schaller gives this same advice: "Select the callers by invitation. Do not issue a general invitation for volunteers! Some people have gifts which greatly reduce their effectiveness as listeners!"¹

There are some people who would not make successful callers. Schaller explains:

... the caller (should) be the type of personality and possess the skills which will not further intensify and enhance these feelings of inadequacy and guilt, will rather help the inactive member overcome these feelings.²

Ellen White described one man who had great knowledge of the truth, but was lacking in sensitivity and love and was not qualified to work for backsliders.

¹Schaller, Hey, That's Our Church, p. 124.
²Schaller, Assimilating New Members, p. 119.
I was shown the case of Brother B. He feels unhappy. He is dissatisfied with his brethren. His mind has been exercised for some time that it was his duty to carry the message. He has the ability, and, as far as his knowledge of the truth is concerned, he is capable; but he lacks culture. He has not learned to control himself. It requires great wisdom to deal with minds, and he is not qualified for this work. He understands the theory, but has not educated himself in forbearance, patience, gentleness, kindness, and true courteousness. If anything arises which does not meet his mind, he does not stop to consider whether it is wisdom to take notice of it, or to let it pass until it shall be fully considered. He braces himself at once for battle. He is harsh, severe, denunciatory, and if things do not meet his mind, he raises disturbance at once.

He passes in his organization the elements of war rather than of sweet peace and harmony. He has not wisdom to give to all their portion of meat in due season. "And of some have compassion, making a difference: and others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire; hating even the garment spotted by the flesh." Brother B has but little knowledge of making this difference. He is rough in his manner and indiscreet in his dealing with souls. This disqualifies him for making a wise, careful shepherd. A shepherd must have noble generosity, courage, fortitude, love, and tenderness combined.1

What are the criteria used to select the seminar participants? Some other programs researched have used fellow pastors or persons with training and experience in psychology and counseling. Ault used a rather impressive list of criteria for his team members:

Understand intellectually and emotionally.
Professional experience in managing, advising, and counseling people.
Basic understanding of how persons function.
Happy and successful with their life's work, themselves and their family.
Emotional and intellectual resilience.
Responsible in the completion of tasks.
Give attention to details, efficient follow-through.
Balance between male and female.

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1White, Testimonies, 2:220. Note: This statement immediately follows strong counsel regarding the need to work for backsliders. It in turn is followed by general counsel to Brother and Sister B regarding their need to learn of Jesus so that they can be used for this work.
Balance - previous experience and no experience.
Married and single.
Varying lengths of membership.
Academically oriented.
Early mid-life years.
Emotionally stable.
No emotional barriers.¹

The criteria Elam used called for some solid, spiritual people:

Continuing spiritual maturity.
Sense of responsibility and commitment.
Faithfulness of participation in church life.
Willing involvement in other ministries.
Concern for the needs of their church.
Overall ability to be included in such a project.
Willingness to serve.
Time available for service.²

Hunter's list shows real insight into qualities needed for this special ministry.

Strong inner faith.
Little need for multiple "victories" to keep incentive going.
Ability to love without immediate reward or returned love.
Sensitivity to where people are.
Good sense of timing.
Patience.
A deep conviction that people are worth spending one's life for.³

There are some basic philosophies in our program that guided us in the selection of qualities by which participants in the Caring Ministry would be chosen. We wanted our program to be such that a majority of church members could qualify, not just a select few. The Caring Ministry is a program for the church at large.

¹Ault, pp. 43, 44.
³Hunter, p. 111.
Furthermore, if this project proved viable and other Adventist churches were to follow a similar plan based on this model, the participants should not be professional counselors but typical church members who use the abilities the Lord has given them for service to others.

With these goals in mind, we drew up the following list of desirable qualities:

Persons who love the Lord and love other people
Persons who understand their faith and are able to talk about it
Persons who have time for the training program and for visitation
Persons who are good listeners or are willing to learn
Persons who can keep a confidence and be trusted
Persons of varying ages and backgrounds
Persons who are responsible and stable and are spiritually mature
Persons who are willing to let God use them to help others.

In keeping with these guidelines, my wife and I (Loretta and I team-lead the seminar) reviewed the entire membership and made a list that included as many members as possible. The large list was then reduced to approximately sixty persons. We then contacted these potential seminar participants and briefly explained the program and the dates selected for the seminars. Almost all the people expressed a desire to join and were able to arrange their schedules to fit the seminar dates.
The week prior to each of the seminars, I scheduled appointments to visit in the homes of the seminar participants. Later I discovered that Gerhard Knutson also recommends this practice.

... either the pastor or chairperson of the evangelism committee should spend time visiting each family or person in order to model the listening witness ministry. Listen to the needs, hurts, feelings, and gifts of the person you visit. Encourage and enable them to share their beliefs as well. Make it not only a visit to invite them to fulfill a task, but also a model experience of how caring, listening-witnessing conversation can progress to a new level of friendship and understanding.

It required considerable effort to make so many visits because the week prior to the seminar was also busy with last-minute details. The visits were worth the effort, however, and helped to build a good foundation for the seminar. Four goals were set for these visits:

1. Explain the purpose of the seminar and the visitation program that would follow and clarify the details of dates, place, meeting times, babysitting arrangements, and meal plans.

2. Become aware of the attitudes toward inactive members and the communication skills possessed by each participant. I used a survey sheet as well as general conversation for this purpose. Their attitudes and skills would have a bearing on the agenda for the seminar as well as being useful when matching callers to inactive members for the visitation program.

3. Come closer to the members and strengthen our personal relationship. This was not just a task-oriented visit but an opportunity for spiritual fellowship together.

Knutsen, p. 35.
4. Model good listening. I wanted to hear any concerns or needs of the participants. Perhaps my listening to them would free them to listen to others.

While visiting in the homes of the participants, I asked them to complete a survey form. Questions on the survey helped me understand how they viewed their listening abilities, how they reacted to criticism, how willing and able they were to visit, and how they felt about inactive members and the dropping of membership. The latter was of particular interest because of the recent experience of Stone Tower Church when 213 members were dropped in a three-year period.

One other factor of special interest in this visit was to identify seminar participants who had previously become discouraged, inactive, or had dropped out of the church. Many times such people have a special interest and ability to reach other dropouts. A total of nineteen persons, or 34 percent of our seminar group, had gone through this experience.

At the end of my visit, I gave each participant a copy of J. R. Spangler's interview of John Savage from the May 1983 Ministry magazine and suggested that he or she read it before the seminar began. This would be an introduction to the concepts and skills that he or she would be learning.

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2 Savage, quoted in Spangler, pp. 4-7, 27.
The Caring Ministry Seminar

Basic Data of the Seminar

The Caring Ministry Seminar is a 27-hour training event that focuses on concepts and methods of ministry to inactive church members and teaches communication skills which may be useful when the teams call on dropouts. Space does not permit a detailed explanation of every aspect of the program, but I will include certain basic information about the seminar in general and about the two seminars that were a part of this project.

Premise

The Caring Ministry Seminar is based on the premise that lay members of the church can learn concepts, skills, and attitudes which will make them effective in calling on inactive church members. Communication skills are taught and practiced in a safe environment. Participants experience through group learning and support a closeness that motivates them to draw others into fellowship in the church.

Methodology

Learning takes place through four media: (1) Cognitive information (concepts, research findings, explanation of skills, suggestions for methods) is given through mini-lectures sprinkled throughout the seminar; (2) attitudes and feelings (of inactive members and of seminar participants) are explored in depth; (3) communication skills are explained, demonstrated, and practiced; and (4) reflection, evaluation, and feedback are constantly employed to process the data for meaning and application.
Team leadership

My wife, Loretta, and I team-lead the seminar. She has also taken both Lab I and II and is equally qualified to lead the seminar. We find this provides balance, pacing, and better identification for the participants.

Leadership modeling

It is very important that as seminar leaders, we model the caring concepts and listening skills during the presentations, at feedback sessions, and during the breaks. Feelings are often stirred up inside participants; we must be sensitive to this and be willing to do a lot of listening ourselves. We must know our material so well we are freed from notes and mechanics and can concentrate on the dynamics taking place within the participants.

Self-learning

Though a lot of learning takes place as the leaders give information regarding concepts and skills, the greatest learning happens in the small groups. Participants coach each other; insight occurs as they practice and reflect together. Occasionally the seminar leaders feel isolated from these private experiences; but our learning experience is to trust the system and let the members receive what they will from the session.

Location and arrangements

Our seminars were held at the Oregon Conference campground—a convenient location with a retreat setting. Merritt and Doris Crawford, campground caretakers, prepared meals for Sabbath lunch.
and supper. We chose a room that was carpeted and would accommodate twice the size of our group. The additional space was needed when we broke into small groups. Dress for all seminar sessions was casual, and participants were encouraged to bring comfortable chairs. Each session was divided by a break during which water and hot drinks were available.

Session times

Savage's original schedule for the seminar calls for meetings on two weekends, consisting of Friday night, Sabbath afternoon and evening, plus all day Sunday. We have learned that the participants assimilate the material better when it is spread over three weekends. Adventists also appreciate having Sundays free. We followed a three-weekend format with two consecutive weekends, one free weekend, and then the final weekend session. Appendix A gives session times and contents.

Group size

Experience has shown that the dynamics are best when the group size is between eighteen and thirty-six persons. We strive for multiples of six because this is most convenient for the small group sessions that have combinations of two, three, and six persons. A total of sixty-one Stone Tower members plus four members from other churches participated in the two seminars.

Finances

We did not charge for the seminar. Participants were informed that the workbook provided each person cost the church
$7.95. They were invited but not required to contribute toward that expense. Cost for meals was cared for through a special contribution made to the church. Should this not be available in the future, we would have potluck meals or might call on the deaconesses or previous seminar graduates to prepare meals, thus keeping the participants' time free for the seminar.

**Contract**

Seminar participants were asked to agree to two conditions: (1) They would need to attend all sessions of the three weekends because the learning experience would be like building blocks and because their learning partners and group would be depending on them; and (2) participants were asked to keep in confidence any experiences or information of a personal nature that might be shared with them during the seminar. For their part, the leaders agreed to stay within the scheduled times and to provide support for the callers when they made visits to the inactive members.

**Understanding the Dropout**

Although one-third of the seminar participants had at one time been inactive or had left the church and therefore had some understanding of the dropout experience, it was important that the group as a whole learn to understand the precipitants of dropping out and the anxieties and feelings that may accompany this experience.

The "Dropout Lecture" was the major presentation of the seminar. Participants learned what research has revealed about the causes of apostasy, the feelings that accompany dropping out, and
Many people are looking for an ear that will listen. They do not find it among Christians, because these Christians are talking where they should be listening.¹

Listening is especially effective in ministry to former or inactive members. The events that created anxiety in their lives have caused them to have feelings of frustration, criticism, or self-doubt. Perhaps they needed someone to talk with when the problems first began. But because no one was available, the tension and frustration grew. The stronger the feelings became, the less people were willing to listen. They may have reached a point where they felt unable to control their emotions any longer and anger, criticism, insecurity, or doubt may have boiled over. If no one could or would listen to these deeply personal feelings, the only alternative left was to withdraw and seal off the pain of an unresolved problem.

Detamore's experience taught him to listen to people's pain.

Listen kindly; listen interestedly. By neither voice nor expression of face disagree with him. Let him rant and rave; the poison is coming out. There is a hope of a future healing of the wound after it has been purged and cauterized.²

Some reclaiming ministry training programs teach people to "listen selectively," that is, to change the subject so as to avoid controversial topics.


²Detamore, Seeking His Lost Sheep, p. 71.
The term 'selective listening' means that a visitor chooses the statements and questions that he responds to. This means if a negative subject is mentioned he changes the discussion to a positive idea.¹

There may be questions asked that could be honestly answered, but to do so might cause a widening of the gulf between the delinquent member and the church.

In the event of this, the visitor will engage in selective listening. He will not ignore what has been said. He will hear and yet he will reply as though he had not heard. In fact, he will direct the conversation to some other matter.²

In the Caring Ministry seminar, we do not teach people to change the subject, but to openly and honestly deal with what concerns the inactive members. This means that the callers may have to face criticism, or anger, or feelings of failure. But to do otherwise is to repeat again the lack of caring that says "we will not listen to you when you say what we do not want to hear."

We do, however, teach the callers not to pry into sordid details of past experiences. Our task is not to investigate or to force people to relive an unpleasant experience but rather to be available with a listening ear and a caring heart that is receptive to whatever is important for the other person to tell.

We also need sensitivity to know when the person has told enough and is beginning to wallow in misery and self-pity or when he or she is crossing the line into very private territory. C. W. Brister stated this principle very well:

¹Edward Miller, p. 49.
²Brooks, p. 23.
... certain secrets and hurts should not be shared. There is always a risk that someone, with defenses down in a crisis, will tell secrets but later resent anyone who knows the truth. If some sufferer trusts you with the headlines of his or her hurt, don't insist on reading the fine print, too.

Listening is the most loving thing we can do for former or inactive members. "Problem solving" is impatient and wants to take the short-cut. But listening means willingness to spend time, to be sensitive to hear not only the words but also the feelings and the meanings the other person is expressing.

In the initial contact with an inactive member there is very little trust. The dropout naturally suspects that our call is to get him or her back to church, to ask for money, or to ask for help in one way or another. This often puts the dropout on the defensive. Our demonstration of caring through listening may come as a surprise, but it quickly builds trust and openness. Savage says:

Listening builds a relationship more quickly and effectively than any other single type of behavior. I'm not talking just about social listening, but effective, depth listening that builds relationships very rapidly.

Caring Ministry callers are often surprised at how rapidly people sense our willingness to listen and will open up to talk with us about what happened to take them away from the church and what now keeps them from a close relationship with Jesus Christ and with His church.


2Savage, quoted in Spangler, p. 6.
During the seminar itself we gave a number of small listening assignments. We asked the participants to listen for something specific each Sabbath morning of the seminar. Sometimes it included listening to the interchange of dialogue in the Sabbath School class or just being aware of fellowship through informal conversations before or after the services. We asked them to observe behavior that included others or screened them out. Sometimes we asked them to initiate a conversation with someone they did not know. During the weeks between the first and second sessions of the seminar, we asked them to become aware of the listening patterns in their place of work or in their own homes. Between the second and third sessions, we gave each participant the name of a church member, usually a shut-in or senior citizen, and asked him or her to have a listening visit with this person. This emphasis on listening builds appreciation of its value and helps the seminar participants become aware of areas where they can improve their listening abilities.

Learning and Practicing the Listening Skills

The concepts taught during the Caring Ministry seminar prepared the participants to understand feelings and experiences dropouts go through when they move outward from the church. Integrated with these concepts was a series of nine communication skills to help the callers become better listeners.

1Attendance at Sabbath morning worship in the home church is a vital part of the seminar. It provides three opportunities to bridge the theories of the Caring Ministry to the reality of the local church situation.
We made it clear from the beginning that communication skills were not to be used to manipulate the inactive members. They do not make us salesmen who have an answer for every objection. The Scriptures forbid us to manipulate people through clever words or human persuasion.

When I came to you, brothers, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. I came to you in weakness and fear, and with much trembling. My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but a demonstration of the Spirit's power, so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power. . . .

We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us. This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom, but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words.

Skills do not take the place of prayer. Skills do not make up for a lack of love, patience, and a genuine interest in another. On the other hand, a loving and caring Christian who is sensitive to the needs of inactive members and is also trained to use communication skills is a good, active listener and provides a climate in which the inactive member feels free to express whatever is on his or her heart.

We do not normally think of Jesus Christ as using "communication skills." But Christ was such a good listener that even the common people felt at ease in His presence and knew that He listened to them with love and tact.

1 Cor 2:1-5, 12, 13 (NIV).
Christ Himself did not suppress one word of truth, but He spoke it always in love. He exercised the greatest tact, and thoughtful, kind attention in His intercourse with the people. He was never rude, never needlessly spoke a severe word, never gave needless pain to a sensitive soul. He did not censure human weakness.

The nine communication skills taught in the caring ministry seminar are described briefly.

**Paraphrase**

Paraphrasing is the skill of restating another person's message in your own words so as to check your accuracy in understanding the content and/or meaning. It is a basic communication skill because it conveys to the other person that you are very interested in him while verifying that you have heard him accurately.

**Perception check**

The perception check is more concerned with the feelings of the other person. The listener is sensitive to the tone of voice and body language that accompany the other person's speaking and uses these to tune in to the feelings. Making a guess at these feelings, the listener makes a tentative, non-judgmental statement of what he or she believes the other person is experiencing and follows this with a question to verify accuracy. When this skill is used appropriately and naturally, it can assist the conversation beyond data gathering to the feelings that reside within the speaker.

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1White, *Desire of Ages*, p. 353.
Behavior description

Behavior description is reporting specific, observable actions of others without making accusation, inferences, or name calling. It is a skill to help the other person become aware of his/her behavior.¹

This skill must be used with tact so that it is non-judmental and does not put the other person on the defensive. It is objectively stating observable behaviors and gently exploring the meaning of those behaviors.

Creative questions

When appropriate questions are asked in the right way, they facilitate the conversation, they show that the listener is genuinely interested, and they often help the speaker go on to say more of what he/she has on his/her mind. Questions should not be used to interrogate or to probe private space. Creative questions may help the speaker explore previously unconsidered areas, relationships, or meanings in such a way that the speaker understands the situation better.

Story listening

People tell us many things about themselves in story form, but often we do not hear the deeper meanings because we are only tuned in to the words or are caught up in the drama of their story. Sometimes our own story is triggered as we recall a similar

¹Savage, Skills for Calling and Caring Ministries, p. 31.
situation and we cease listening to the other person. Story listening is a skill that trains the Caring Ministry teams to recognize various levels of story as indicators of trust and openness, and to understand the deeper meanings of another person's experience as he or she couches it in story form. Seminar participants are also taught not to let their own counter stories sabotage their ability to listen, but to use their feelings triggered by the counter story as a mirror to better understand the inactive member.

**Fogging**

Those who call on inactive members often encounter criticism. A number of skills can be used to help the callers avoid becoming defensive while hearing the real message of these criticisms. Sometimes the callers may use paraphrase, perception check, or the direct expression of their own feelings. A special skill that helps callers respond to the truth in the criticism without becoming defensive is called "fogging." Fogging is usually followed by a perception check to better understand the meaning of the criticism. This skill often stops the critical cycle. Because the critic knows he has been heard, he is free to explain the meanings and feelings associated with the criticism.

**Negative inquiry**

The introduction of the skill of negative inquiry often surprises seminar participants because it asks for more criticism. It is very difficult for callers to know how to respond to generalized criticism, such as, "The church is not very friendly." Negative inquiry asks for more specific information, for
clarification, or for a behavior description of the actions being criticized. Our experience is that inactive members respond well when they realize that we care enough about them to listen even to their criticisms.

**Story polarizations**

Inactive members tell many stories of their personal lives and of the times when they were active in the church. Callers need to be sensitive to both the positive and negative poles of these stories, realizing that both poles are present in every person's experience, even though only one may be expressed. Frequently the stories are negative and recall unpleasant events. Recognizing a balance in the poles of these stories helps the caller avoid misjudging the inactive member's feelings. Even though the conversation may be predominantly negative, a gentle exploration of the positive pole may help the dropout recall pleasant experiences associated with the church. Correct use of these positive poles can help build a foundation for returning to a happy and satisfied life in the church.

**Life commandments**

As the callers really get to know the inactive members, patterns, scripts, or what we call "life commandments" begin to emerge. These commandments are usually formed in the early years of childhood or in the beginning experiences in the church. Some commandments need to be broken, but in appropriate ways. Dropping out of the church is often a way of breaking life commandments, e.g., "We don't listen to that kind of music," "Adventists always
go to church on Sabbath." The sensitive caller can pick up on these commandments (which may, in fact, be outside the inactive member's awareness) and tactfully help the dropout realize what has been happening in his/her life. Listening for life commandments is the deepest of the communication skills and, when used with love and in cooperation with the Holy Spirit, can be a powerful tool to help the inactive member understand what caused the drift away from the church and how to return.

During the Caring Ministry seminar, these nine communication skills are taught in a building-block sequence. Each one is explained, illustrated, and practiced. Participants may feel awkward when first practicing the skills in isolation. Their small "home" group is usually broken into smaller groups of two, three, or six people for practice. When in triads, one person is the speaker, the second the listener, and the third is an observer who coaches the speaker and listener during a debriefing period. Learning takes place from all three perspectives.

It is very important that team members have opportunity to practice the skills before they call in the homes of the inactive members. Douglas W. Johnson's book on The Care and Feeding of Volunteers points out this importance.

People ought to be able to practice their task before they are charged with full responsibility for it. This is the basis for the apprenticeship in crafts or the internship in medicine or the practice-teacher requirement in education. In each of these, the person works in the actual job situation, but does it alongside a more experienced individual for a time. It is a learning and a testing time.¹

This "safe environment" allows the callers to build confidence in their ability to listen and frees them from the mechanics of conversation so they can focus on the needs of the inactive member.

Dealing with Emotions

One aspect of the Caring Ministry seminar needs special consideration for reasons unique to the Seventh-day Adventist Church. During the seminar we teach participants to become sensitive to feelings--their own and those of the inactive members. We encourage them not to change the subject if the dropout begins recalling negative experiences. We help the callers not to be afraid of the expression of feelings, knowing that the anger, doubt, discouragement, etc., must be worked out before the inactive member will be able and ready to return to active life in the church.

However, we are very aware of certain counsel through the writings of Ellen White which warns us away from the study of our own emotions and the sharing of personal information. The following are a few statements of this counsel:

It is not wise to look to ourselves and study our emotions. If we do this, the enemy will present difficulties and temptations that weaken faith and destroy courage. Closely to study our emotions and give way to our feelings is to entertain doubt and entangle ourselves in perplexity. We are to look away from self to Jesus.¹

We should make no one our confidant but Jesus. We can safely commune with Him of all that is in our hearts.²

²White, Testimonies, 5:201.
Do not talk of your lack of faith and your sorrows and sufferings. The tempter delights to hear such words. When talking on gloomy subjects, you are glorifying him. We are not to dwell on the great power of Satan to overcome us. Often we give ourselves into his hands by talking of his power. Let us talk instead of the great power of God to bind up all our interests with His own. Tell of the matchless power of Christ, and speak of His glory.

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

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

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

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

1Ibid., p. 253.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

There is need of shepherds who, under the direction of the Chief Shepherd, will seek for the lost and straying. This means the bearing of physical discomfort and the sacrifice of ease. It means a tender solicitude for the erring, a divine compassion and forbearance. It means an ear that can listen with sympathy to heartbreaking recitals of wrong, of degradation, of despair and misery.¹

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

Helping the Dropout Return

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

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

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

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

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

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

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1Jer 24:7.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Visitation of Inactive Members

Initiation of the Calling Program

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Support Groups

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

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

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

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

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

¹Ault, p. 134.


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

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

**Debriefing calls**

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

**Keeping confidences**

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

**Practicing skills**

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

**Designing follow-up calls**

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

**Providing information about the life of the congregation**

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

**Spiritual and emotional nurture and fellowship**

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

**Feedback to leaders and pastors**

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

**Evaluation of the calling program**

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

**Membership Reaffirmation Month**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Follow-up

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

¹Brooks, p. 20.

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

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

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

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

1Ballew, p. 104.
CHAPTER IV

EVALUATION

Evaluation of the Caring Ministry

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

¹Ault, p. 27.

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

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

In the words of Savage:

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

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

Evaluation of the Training Seminar

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Just before we began the visitation, one caller said,

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The concerns expressed by the participants and the other trainers contain seeds for suggestions of ways to improve the seminar. In the section entitled, "Improving the Effectiveness of
the Caring Ministry program in Seventh-day Adventist Churches," page 169 below, some of those suggestions are presented along with my own recommendations.

Response of the Inactive Members

At the beginning of the project it was decided to announce the Caring Ministry in a quiet way that would not make our inactive members defensive. We did not want them to feel we were making them targets for a campaign to get them back to church. In the March 1983 newsletter mailed to all members, I described the seminar as an experience "that would help us be more loving and caring to active and inactive members alike." When reporting on the seminar in the next month's newsletter, and just prior to the visitation program, I wrote:

There is a genuine desire on the part of many people to help our church be a real caring community. We want to be warm, caring and sensitive to the needs of others. Please continue to pray for those in the Caring Ministry as they begin to reach out to others.

The inactive members responded to the Caring Ministry callers in a variety of ways. Some offered resistance; some were polite but distant; some were grateful for and open to this initiative from members of the church. A few inactive members told the callers that they had been expecting a visit.

Prior to the seminar and visitation program, the names of all members were classified into seven categories (see pp. 96 and 97). One of the surprises of this project was the amount of new information that came from the callers' visits. For example, eight members thought to be in the less active or inactive categories
were discovered to be strong in the faith but physically unable to attend services, and were thus reclassified.

Callers discovered that some who were inactive at Stone Tower were attending other Adventist churches in the Portland area. In five cases callers were instrumental in helping these members arrange transfers of their membership. Even though this did not reestablish them at Stone Tower, it was a viable option of this ministry in that it helped strengthen the relationship of these members to a church where they could become more involved.

During the homecoming month of June, callers invited inactive members to attend worship and then stay for fellowship meals. Many of the callers also invited inactive members to their homes for lunch on the last Sabbath of the month. Table 3 below gives the numbers and percentages of members by categories attending worship during the homecoming month.

\[
\text{TABLE 3} \\
\text{STONE TOWER MEMBERS ATTENDING HOMECOMING WORSHIP SERVICES}
\]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Classification</th>
<th>No. of Members</th>
<th>No. Attending</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A\textsuperscript{1}</td>
<td>226</td>
<td>218</td>
<td>96.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A\textsuperscript{2}</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>16.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A\textsuperscript{3}</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>36.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>76.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C\textsuperscript{1}</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>23.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C\textsuperscript{2}</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C\textsuperscript{3}</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The figures from this table that are most important to this project are the twenty-three less active (B) and thirty-one inactive
(C1) members attending, 76.7 and 23.1 percent, respectively. The Caring Ministry callers were encouraged by this initial response. Individual callers rejoiced to see the people they had visited attend church during this special month.

In order to follow the long-term effects of the Caring Ministry program, the visitation continued until the end of November 1983, at which time the membership categories were restudied to see what changes had occurred during the visitation program.

It was our joy to see that thirty members had become more active in the life of the church, nineteen of them moving into the active (A) categories and eleven into the less active (B) category. We were also saddened that four members had begun drifting away from the church and were now classified as inactive (C1) and that one member was dropped for apostasy. Appendix E gives a full tabulation of the membership classification changes that occurred within the period under study.

Learning and Growth of the Callers

Prior to the Caring Ministry seminar, I visited in the homes of most of the participants. I had prepared a survey sheet and had included a few open-ended questions regarding the participants' own experiences in the church and their attitudes toward backsliding and visitation.

These surveys indicated that most of the participants saw themselves as somewhat sensitive listeners, but they were cautious about getting involved and were concerned about the amount of time they had available. The participants apparently had strong
convictions about backsliding and the church's response to dropouts. These strong convictions came from at least three sources.

1. One third of the participants had experienced a time in their own lives when they had become inactive or had dropped out of the church. Some told their own stories of falling away and then coming back, their tears showing that they still felt the pain of that experience. One lady recounted:

   I was out of the church for ten years. I did not receive any caring, but I did not expect any either because I knew that it was my own fault that I was out of the church. But now I know what it is like, and I want to try to help others.

2. Many of the participants had children, other relatives, or friends who had dropped out of the church. Some of them told me with anguish how they prayed daily for their loved ones. One man told about his five children who were raised in the church and had attended Adventist schools but were now all out of the church.

3. Most of the participants had been members of Stone Tower Church between the years of 1979 and 1981 when 213 persons were dropped from membership. All the participants who brought up this topic during our discussion felt the church had acted harshly without having done enough to try to win back the inactive members.

   Many of the participants wrote short notes on the survey sheets regarding how they felt the church should relate to inactive members:

   Inactive members become inactive because the regular members fail to keep in touch. Keep them in and keep in touch; remove their names only if there is a gross violation of church beliefs.

   Contact the people--do not give up too easily.
Make a concerted effort to reincorporate members and encourage them, then consider what actions need to be taken.

The reasons for inactivity should be determined before a judgment is made.

Put more emphasis on a relationship with Jesus; if that is correct, the church membership will automatically follow.

Participants' appreciation for the opportunity to learn concepts and practice skills in small groups has been reported above (p. 143). In the early part of the seminar, it soon became apparent that there was a great deal more taking place within these groups. People were talking about themselves and sharing their experiences. The body language showed an intensity of feelings as groups often pulled closer together while sharing deep inner feelings. Many times when we called for breaks, a group or two or three individuals from it would continue sharing something that was very important to them.

Later, some of the participants told us, "The most helpful part of the seminar was being able to tell our learning partners about ourselves." They also shared their anxieties about the calling program. One man reported, "From the group I learned that there are others just as scared as I am to make a start in visiting members." At the bottom of her seminar evaluation sheet one perceptive lady wrote, "I sensed that we were helping many individuals while we were learning."

Following the seminar the participants were asked to evaluate how they felt the seminar had contributed to their growth. As table 4 shows, most participants felt very positive about their growth experience.
TABLE 4

PARTICIPANTS' EVALUATION OF PERSONAL GROWTH

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Evaluation Response</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. I intentionally use the listening skills.</td>
<td>85%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. I am more sensitive to others.</td>
<td>82%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. I am more aware of &quot;cries for help.&quot;</td>
<td>85%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. I am more aware of stories others tell.</td>
<td>74%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e. I am more perceptive of feelings in myself.</td>
<td>87%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f. I am more perceptive of feelings in others.</td>
<td>79%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

At the close of the training, the participants were invited but not required to become callers in the visitation program. A few did not wish to make calls, offering such comments as, "No, I don't feel I can take part in the visitation program. However, I will keep my eyes and ears open for every opportunity to share my faith." "My partner says I have to turn in this card saying 'maybe' I will do visitation."

Fifty-one participants agreed to be callers and selected names of less active and inactive members to visit. As they filled out the cards indicating their willingness to participate, many expressed how eager they were to be part of the calling program.

I have been praying that our Lord would use me in any way that He can, and I see this program as a very good way. I can't see a better way of being used for His work.

I think the program is great and fills a great need. Yes, I want to be involved. I feel inadequate still, but excited about what the Lord can accomplish through this program and our willingness to be used.

Yes, I very much want to get involved with the visitation work. I'm excited about the skills we have learned and feel God is going to bless in a mighty way. I am so glad I was able to become a part of this ministry.
As the seminar leader, I was excited at these responses indicating personal growth and willingness to be involved in the calling program. Prior to the training, most participants were cautious about involvement, but now a larger number were eager to start visiting and were expecting positive results. However, in my joy at the success of the seminar, I failed to notice the large number of people who still felt inadequate and were asking for more help.

The callers were requested to indicate on the post-seminar evaluation their attitude approaching the visitation program. The results of this question are shown in table 5.

**TABLE 5**

**POST-SEMINAR ATTITUDES TOWARD VISITATION**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attitude Response</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. Confident and comfortable</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Eager to get started</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Doubtful of any long-term results</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. Concerned about available time</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e. Unsure of skills and ability to handle situations that may arise</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f. Will need a lot of support from my calling partner</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>g. Expecting to see some inactive members return as a result of my caring for them</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When studying the data from the seminar in preparation for writing this project report, I suddenly became aware of what I had failed to see earlier. Only 37 percent of the participants indicated that they felt confident and comfortable with the concepts and skills to be used in the visitation program; 47 percent felt unsure about their ability; and 50 percent said they
would need a lot of support from their calling partners. These three statements indicated that at least half the people who were willing to visit did not yet feel ready to call on inactive members and were hoping for more support.

When this pattern of feeling inadequate emerged from the data, I went back through my notes looking for other comments that should have been picked up earlier. One person had written a little postscript on her evaluation form and had underlined the last word: "It would be great to go on a visit with you." Another had said:

I am concerned about producing a negative reaction or causing further polarization through being misunderstood or through wrong handling of conditions.

Still another said, "I am scared of the responsibility of participating in this project."

As part of our plan for providing personal support, Loretta and I told the callers we would be available to help them at any time and would go with them if they requested it. We also told them we were willing to offer individual council for any situation in which they felt that need. We followed through with this type of support in a number of cases, but had we realized how much the callers felt the need of additional help, we would have exerted more effort to provide that individual support.

Prior to the seminar we had studied several options available for a group support program which would continue after the seminar concluded. The first option, which I will call "simultaneous visitation," has all the callers visiting at the same time, either with or without appointments. Callers gather at a
central point for prayer and assignments, make their visits, and return for sharing and support. The second option, called "individual visitation," plans for the callers to schedule appointments at different times according to the convenience of the inactive members. Sometime after the visits are made, the callers gather for a support meeting.

We elected to follow the "individual visitation" format to allow greater flexibility in scheduling appointments with the inactive members. We felt it was important to give their schedules and needs priority over ours, but it soon became apparent that this format lacked the impetus provided by having everyone make calls at the same time. It also lacked the immediacy of sharing problems and joys while they were still fresh in mind and heart. Our support program was further weakened by the fact that we were competing with a very crowded church calendar; thus the whole group met together on a very irregular basis. As a result, the morale, unity, and sense of accomplishment also suffered. Later I determined that only 59 percent of the callers actually visited in the homes of inactive members.

From the difficulties we encountered in our support program, I have developed a number of suggestions for improvement. These are outlined in the section entitled "Improving the Effectiveness of the Caring Ministry Program in Seventh-day Adventist Churches" (p. 169).
The support system was the weakest part of the program; yet many callers, when the calling period ended and they reflected on their experiences, had insights of personal growth to share.

The Caring Ministry helped me to initiate contacts I otherwise would not have made. Now I am taking names and contacting new people—and am comfortable in doing so.

I am learning how to really listen and am less hesitant to talk to people now. I am more sure of myself.

I am learning to share my own inner thoughts and to share others' inner thoughts and needs.

I feel that I am becoming a better listener. Now because of some of my new listening skills, I've learned what's really been happening to me and how to even teach these things to my own family.

I have learned how to relate to many different types of people.

I know that anger is not always directed at me and that people need to have someone to talk to.

Before closing this section on the experience of the callers, it seems appropriate to discuss a concern for which there is very little data but which I feel merits consideration. I have often wondered what effect the Caring Ministry program has on the participants/callers in terms of their own thoughts and feelings of dropping out.

Two questions repeatedly come to mind: (1) To what extent might the research, concepts, and role plays of dropping out plant seed thoughts in the minds of the participants? If a person came to the seminar feeling discouraged or frustrated over some personal experience or something in his church life, would the seminar contribute to his dropping out or would the very concepts and
process we go through in the seminar help him overcome the problem and remain strong in the faith and in the church? (2) If someone who had taken the Caring Ministry seminar should later drop out of the church, would it be easier or harder to reach that person using the very principles and methods of this program?

I have very little data available from which to suggest answers to these questions. To date I am not aware of any evidence that the seminar has planted any seed thoughts or has encouraged anyone to drop out. One lady told the whole group that when she came to the seminar she was very discouraged and was contemplating dropping out. During the seminar she began reflecting on how she had previously dropped out of the Baptist church. She began to ask herself if dropping out was what she really wanted to do again. She confessed to the group that the understanding she was receiving and the support and caring she was experiencing had made her firmly decide to stay strong in the church.

Two other experiences of my visiting former seminar participants who were in the process of dropping out need expression here. The first few minutes of each visit were a little awkward because we both realized that this was the real situation which we had studied and role played during the seminar. I decided to approach the issue directly, reminding the now inactive member of what we had experienced previously and assuring her that I was coming, not as a seminar leader but as one who cared a great deal for her. In one case the awkwardness was soon forgotten and we spoke freely; in the other situation the visit remained difficult throughout.
In another case, a church member whose wife was dropping out confronted me. Both had participated in a Caring Ministry seminar. He said, "I remember all the things we talked about in the seminar. My wife has been doing many little things to cry for help, but you have not responded to them." This made me realize what a responsibility this program places on me and on the entire Caring Ministry team. People have increased expectations for understanding and caring. We must not disappoint them by failing to be sensitive or to respond to their cries for help.

It is probable that the degree of success we might have in visiting a former seminar participant who dropped out of the church would be directly related to whether that person saw the Caring Ministry as psychology, skills, and manipulation, or whether he had felt the deep, spiritual caring that is the real foundation of this program.

Personal Learning and Growth

Going into this project I assumed that my personal learning would take place in leading the seminar and working with the callers in visitation. While this was true, I was surprised at a whole new area of learning that has made this project extremely valuable.

The process of writing and rewriting, of struggling to interpret the data, of understanding what was really happening in the seminar and the calling program, of understanding myself--my attitudes, anxieties, convictions--these were the real learnings which helped me to grow the most.
In the beginning of the project I assumed that the statistical, quantitative method was the only way to do research. Because of my feelings of inadequacy, I allowed this project to drag out over a long period of time. My discovery of the descriptive methodology of research gave me heart. This was something I felt capable of doing; at first, it even seemed easier. However, my advisor, Dr. Gardner, kept pushing me to dig deeper. When I took my early drafts to him he said: "From what you have told me about this program, there really was a lot more going on than what I see on this paper." When the next draft looked more like "verbal statistics," he encouraged me to be more descriptive. When he read my third draft, he saw how I had swung to the opposite pole and he penciled all over the copy, "Where is the supporting data?"

Each writing and rewriting of this report has given me new understanding. It has also helped me to realize that the descriptive methodology requires a lot of work because it forces one to dig deeply into the dynamics of the people and events and into one's own understanding and attitudes. I am grateful for this struggle and am actually glad that the report was not completed two years ago.

My first experience with the Caring Ministry program made me grasp hold of it quickly, sensing that this was a powerful program to help my ministry and my church. It helped me understand myself; it gave me some much needed tools for ministry to dropouts.
Like a new convert, I immediately wanted to share this wonderful learning with others. As soon as possible, I took Lab II to help me teach these concepts to my church.

Teaching my first seminar was frustrating and disappointing. I wanted everyone to see what I had seen and to be gripped by it as I had been. I wanted them to have the same enthusiasm I had. I wanted them to understand in two weekends what I had come to learn in more than six months. I discovered, however, that being the seminar leader was a different experience. I could not be a part of those small circles of learning, making sure that everyone understood all the concepts and skills. When the groups were sharing personal experiences, my part was to sit at my table, waiting for the next module of the seminar to begin, feeling alone and left out.

It was a difficult but valuable lesson to learn—to trust the system and trust the people. Each participant had to bring his own background to the seminar and take away however much or little he would. He might not go away with my level of understanding or enthusiasm for ministry to inactive members, but each person had to have the freedom to choose; my part was to give way to the Holy Spirit to bring understanding and commitment to ministry. My role was to learn to be more objective and to be more understanding and tolerant of the uniqueness of each individual. In this way I learned to trust people more and to rely more upon the Holy Spirit.
My great love and enthusiasm for the Caring Ministry made me very sensitive to any criticism of the program. I had so identified myself and my standing with the success of this project that it just had to succeed. Any criticism of the project was personal criticism to me. The struggles I went through over the methodology of research made me feel incapable of doing what was expected and caused me to feel unsuccessful as a pastor.

Naturally, I feel better now that I have found a methodology that I can do; but the real learning gained from this experience is to be more relaxed and not be so intense and anxious to succeed—not to identify myself so closely with my work that we stand or fall together.

There is another area in which I have gained insight. It is an interesting phenomenon that the church members want the pastor to be loving, caring, sensitive, and understanding—but not too perceptive. They want him to be responsive to the people's needs within the congregation but not overly sensitive to the personal, deeply hidden things within.

This dichotomy became apparent when, in the seminar, we began talking about body language and how it helps us understand more than just the words people are saying. Naturally people do not want to be misinterpreted by a gesture or facial expression taken out of context, so a number of participants were ill at ease when we suggested that inner feelings reveal themselves through
body language. This same uneasiness surfaced more when we came to neurolinguistics and to the "skunks" and "turtles," both of which are skills that can help us understand the inner workings of another.

It is possible that this is one reason why some participants said the seminar had too much psychology--they were aware that through psychology and sensitivity, one person could have the ability to "see" things hidden in another. It was also obvious that they do not want the pastor to be a deep student of psychology.

This feeling is understandable. I, too, feel uncomfortable with someone who seems extremely perceptive, as though he or she could read my every thought and interpret my every expression for its deeper meanings. Certainly the Caring Ministry callers and the pastor must not come across to others as being manipulative or as invading another's private space.

People and what makes them think, feel, and act as they do have always been interesting to me, but this experience taught me that there is an important difference between a caring, loving sensitivity and a clinical invasion of people's inner selves. Above all else, people want their pastor to be a man of God and a student of His Word. They want whatever sensitivities he has to come from a love of people and the promptings of the Holy Spirit. They want to know that he is sensitive to their needs, but they also want to be comfortable in his presence.
Improving the Effectiveness of the Caring Ministry Program in Seventh-day Adventist Churches

In my judgment, the Caring Ministry is a sound program, one that is needed in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. We already have and are continuing to develop good strategies for evangelism and outreach into the community. Our church leaders are working to improve our program of nurture so that it includes assimilation, spiritual guardian plans, continuing Bible study, spiritual gifts development, and involvement in witnessing, small groups, and fellowship activities.

In addition to these, we need the Caring Ministry because as long as Satan is alive and working, temptation and discouragement will cause people to backslide. Every church needs members who are sensitive and caring, who know how to be helpful when others are in crisis. In this way many can be saved before they dropout. Undoubtedly there will always be inactive members whose names are on the church record but who are uninvolved in the life and mission of the church. And furthermore, there will always be many former Adventists living in the areas around our churches. For these reasons, we need to have the Caring Ministry as a permanent program of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

However, this study of the seminar and calling program has shown several areas that call for improvement. The suggestions brought together here come from the participants and callers who were part of our team, from other trainers, and from my own observations and reflections. Some recommendations have an obvious
basis in the data already presented. Others will come from that "in the bones" conviction of which Glasser and Strauss spoke (in the chapter on methodology). Hopefully these recommendations will serve to strengthen our ministry to the inactive and former members.

Restructure the Training Seminar on a Two-Tier Format

The seminar participants complained of too much sitting, of feeling a time pressure to learn and practice the concepts and skills, of too much psychology, and of not being able to assimilate all the material into one usable whole. Perhaps all these problems could be alleviated by simply restructuring the seminar on a two-tier basis.

The new sequence would offer a basic program to give the participants an understanding of the world of the dropout, a Biblical foundation for this ministry, and a few basic skills. Callers, with support from the seminar leaders, could begin visiting inactive members right away. Advanced skills and concepts would then be added later as a part of the continuation of learning and the support program.1

Certain advantages to this new sequence are apparent: (1) Sitting time in the basic course would be reduced while attention and learning would improve, (2) the participants would not be overwhelmed with more information than they can assimilate at one time, (3) actual visitation experience would give relevance to the

1See appendix F for a suggested grouping of basic and advanced materials.
advanced skills, (4) starting the visitation early in the program would help keep the focus on mission so that the skills would be learned in the context of actual ministry, and (5) the advanced concepts and skills would be shared by the leaders in response to the felt needs of the participants.

Some disadvantages must also be considered: (1) This new sequence would be possible only where the trainers and participants lived close to each other (it would work at Stone Tower Church where the pastor is the trainer; it might not work where the trainer traveled a long distance to conduct the seminar and where his or her time schedule required a compact presentation); (2) callers would be sent out to visit inactive members before they are fully trained; and (3) continuity and momentum might suffer because of time lag in a stretched-out program.

It seems, however, that the advantages far outweigh the disadvantages. I am convinced that this new sequence contains the solution to the participants' complaints that the seminar is lacking in spirituality. By reducing the feeling of time pressure, eliminating the need to cram large amounts of information into a short time, allowing more time for Bible study and heart preparation, and involving the callers in visitation early in the program, attention would be continually focused on mission—God's mission and our mission to the inactive members among us.

Improve the Support System

In this seminar we elected the "individual visitation" format (see pp. 160, 161 above). Several problems were encountered
with this method. In keeping with the proposed two-tier seminar sequence, I would suggest a number of improvements to the support program.

(1) After the participants complete the basic seminar, they would be invited to join the calling teams. (2) The pool of names for visitation at that time would not include inactive members who are known to be highly resistant or critical. (3) Callers would arrange appointments to visit inactive members on any of two or three nights a week. (4) The team leaders would be available to go with the callers on these visits as requested. (5) All those making calls on a given night would meet at a central point for prayer, make their visits, and then return for support and fellowship. (6) The entire seminar group would also meet together one Sabbath afternoon each month.

This plan offers individual, small group, and also total group support. The team leaders would plan definite times to be available to accompany the callers and to offer council and encouragement. The callers would be able to share their problems and joys with each other while these things were still fresh in their minds and hearts. Motivation and momentum would be sustained by the sense that others were also calling in the homes. All of this could be done while maintaining our priority of scheduling appointments at the convenience of the inactive members.

The type of support needed according to this plan probably would be different from what we experienced during this project.
Our callers then were struggling to know how to assimilate all the information presented in the seminar and were reluctant to make calls for fear of not being able to remember everything or to use all the skills.

In the new support system the callers might be looking for help in initiating the first visit, help in overcoming the "fear of the unknown." They might be encouraged by being allowed to accompany the team leaders for a visit or two so they could see first-hand what it is like to visit inactive members.

The monthly support meeting of the total group would provide opportunity for review and council, for Bible study and prayer, and for the presentation and practice of advanced skills and concepts, the introduction of which could be initiated by the experiences and requests of the callers.

Incorporate the Skills of Assessment and Behavior Change into the Program

Currently I am in training to become a volunteer chaplain with the Portland police department. Part of our preparation includes classes in crisis counseling and suicide prevention under Dr. Raymond Carey, a clinical psychologist and pastoral consultant for the Roman Catholic Archdiocese in Portland. Carey has continually urged the class to do thorough work in assessment and in assisting people toward behavior change. He said:
Traditional assessment usually asks the question "why," inferring that when we know the cause, motivation and change will follow. But we never know why for sure, and knowing why doesn't always solve the problem. We need to learn to ask "what" and "how." What is happening? How has your life changed? What impact has this had on you? What are the resources or plans you have available?

Sometimes being nice to people with sympathy, caring and listening alone is harmful because it teaches people to be passive. It reinforces bad decisions and leads to depression and dependence.

Understanding what people are saying to themselves or are experiencing is helpful, but it is not enough. People need gentle challenges. Amateur helpers rush to intervention and problem solving. But what is needed is the collaborative effort of helping people form a simple action plan for behavior change.¹

Caring Ministry seminar participants have frequently been frustrated over the lack of practical tools they can use to help the inactive members. We have trained and encouraged them to be good, active listeners. But the callers also want to know what to say or do to be helpful.

The section "Demonstrating Caring Through Listening" (p. 111 above) clearly stated my belief that listening can be a healing and helping agent. But I, too, am not satisfied with the brief seminar modules on renegotiation of expectations and the return tracks. Future seminars need to spend more time teaching participants the skills of assessment and helping them learn how to appropriately introduce suggestions for change.

Teach the Callers How to Use the Bible in Visitation

Savage states up front in his introductory presentation of Lab I that the seminar will not train the participants to use the Bible when calling on inactive members. Savage may do this because he is working with many denominations and because his program is already filled with other information.

Our callers have repeatedly requested that we help them learn how to use the Bible in visitation. Sometimes I have shied away from this out of fear that the callers would use the Bible inappropriately and turn their visit into a preaching session. A better answer would be to teach the callers how to use the Bible and what passages are appropriate to this ministry.

The Bible is filled with stories of those who turned away from God and then found His love and forgiveness again. The appeals in the Old Testament to wandering Israel provide Biblical assurance that God and His Church will receive those who come back. Many inactive or former Adventists may never have known or may have forgotten what it is like to have a personal experience with Jesus Christ.

The seminar participants need to learn the appropriate scriptures and how to use them with spiritual sensitivity so that they may lead the inactive members to a new experience with Christ. A caller who urges an inactive member to come back to church without also reuniting that person to Christ has not completed the work of the Caring Ministry.
A list of Bible texts on "God's Caring - Our Caring," "Conversion and Salvation," "Forgiveness and Returning," and "Acceptance and Assurance" appears in appendix G.¹

Replace the Secular and Technical Vocabulary with Biblical Imagery and Expressions

At first glance the suggestion to replace one set of vocabulary with another may seem like a superficial way to deal with a problem. However, there is more than semantics involved in this suggestion.

Throughout the seminar, participants are continually hearing terms such as Lab I, anxiety provoking events, neurotic and existential anxiety, renegotiation of expectations, neurolinguistics, and closure.

Those who are familiar with these terms from a background in education, psychology or management do not find them inappropriate. Others, however, stumble over them and are led to believe that the focus of the seminar is on knowledge and psychology. Using Biblical terminology and illustrations and studying the methods Christ used in personal ministry would be more appropriate to the spiritual nature of this work.

Areas For Further Study and Incorporation

At least four areas would benefit from further study and incorporation into the Caring Ministry program.

¹In addition to these Bible texts, there is also a collection of select quotations from the writings of Ellen G. White on backsliding and returning in Appendix H.
1. We need to study Adventist dropout and return. Some work has already been done to determine the causes of apostasy, but many of our seminar participants want to know how relevant Savage's research is to Adventist dropouts. We especially need to study what will help Adventist dropouts return to the church. Many researchers have studied apostasy; what we need to study now is returning.

2. It would be a worthwhile project to study the concept of spiritual gifts in relation to a ministry to inactive members. If we knew which gifts best prepared callers for this unique ministry, it would help the church select those whom the Holy Spirit is already equipping for this work.

3. A study should be conducted to determine whether former dropouts make better callers than those who have always remained in the church. Former dropouts may have a better understanding of the experience and thus be better able to relate to those who have withdrawn from the church. On the other hand, their own "counter story" might get in the way and block real listening.

4. A most important area for further study is a follow-up of those who return to active membership. We need to know what we can do to keep them active and to use their experiences to strengthen the church.

The Future of the Caring Ministry Program
In Stone Tower Church

The Caring Ministry is a permanent part of the Stone Tower Church that expands and changes as time passes. In addition to the seminar and support program changes proposed above, five additional areas are possible for future growth.
1. Team rotation. Volunteers are willing to do almost any task in the church for a specific period of time, but not indefinitely. Because calling on inactive and former members is a difficult ministry, the callers need a plan for rotation. We are developing a system by which a small group of callers would commit themselves to three months of intense visitation. At the end of their term, a new team of callers would take over. If a strong relationship had developed between a particular caller and an inactive member, that caller might extend his rotation, especially with that person, for the sake of continuity. Otherwise, a fresh team would take up the work for another three-month period.

We are also working on a rotation of visitation ministries. Callers who visit only inactive members may soon burn out. The plan of rotation would include other possibilities such as interests, young families, new members, shut-ins, etc.

2. Sharing names of inactive members. Within the Portland area there are twelve Adventist churches that have pooled the names of their inactive members for visitation purposes. The names are redistributed according to the zip code mission territories assigned by the conference. Thus pastors and members have the opportunity to visit inactive members from any church who live close to their area. Should interest be awakened in these non-attending members, a transfer of membership, rebaptism, or other involvement in the local church may take place.
3. Contact ministry. Whenever the name of a member is dropped because of apostasy or being missing, that name is usually lost from further contact. The name is deleted from the conference computer, and the person no longer receives the Gleaner or the church newsletter. Only by coincidence or memory of an acquaintance would a renewed contact occur.

We are initiating a new program called the "Contact Ministry" which will gather names of former Adventists living throughout the greater Portland area. The conference has given both funding and cooperation in setting up this program.

Names gathered from friends, relatives, and old church and conference records will be entered into a computer. A set of short letters and small tracts to be mailed out occasionally are in preparation. Whenever a church from any portion of the city sponsors a special series of meetings, they may request the names of the former members who live in their area. As time permits, our Caring Ministry teams and I will personally call on these former members.

It is believed that more than 7,000 former Adventists live in the greater Portland area, so we expect to be busy. However, the investment of time is worth the effort in order to keep the bridge of contact open.

4. Mission territory development. Stone Tower Church has embarked on a systematic program of cultivating our mission territory. We are forming teams of members who will accept a carrier route as their personal mission field. These teams will
distribute literature, conduct surveys, give Bible studies, hold health education classes, offer public service, and visit in the homes within their territory. One of the special goals of the teams is to search for inactive or former Adventists. The name of the former Adventist will be given to the Caring Ministry group for follow-up.

5. Prevention-retention. Future plans for the Caring Ministry would not be complete without giving careful attention to preventing apostasy through retention of our present members and those who return to the church. The Church Ministries Council and Church Board are making progress in this direction through such avenues as the elders' visitation program, the spiritual guardian plan, home-division visitation of seniors and shut-ins, a family-life resource center, fellowship and social activities by age and interest groups, and the formation of small groups for study, prayer, and fellowship.
### APPENDIX A

#### CARING MINISTRY SEMINAR SEQUENCE

**First Weekend**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Session I</th>
<th>Manual Ref</th>
<th>Minutes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction to the Seminar</td>
<td>I-2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Get Acquainted</td>
<td>I-2</td>
<td>10</td>
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<tr>
<td>Choose Partners</td>
<td>I-3</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Form Support Groups</td>
<td>I-3</td>
<td>23</td>
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<tr>
<td>Inclusion-Exclusion</td>
<td>I-4</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Break</td>
<td></td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ritual of Beginning</td>
<td>I-6</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drop-Out Experience</td>
<td>I-6</td>
<td>46</td>
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<tr>
<td>Assignment and Closing</td>
<td>I-8</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Session II</th>
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<tr>
<td>Reflecting on the Worship Experience</td>
<td>III-19</td>
<td>15</td>
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<tr>
<td>Communication &amp; Skills Overview</td>
<td>III-19</td>
<td>19</td>
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<td>Interpersonal Gap</td>
<td>III-21</td>
<td>28</td>
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<td>III-23</td>
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<td>Break</td>
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<td>13</td>
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<tr>
<td>Drop-Out Lecture</td>
<td>II-12</td>
<td>43</td>
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<td>Round Robin Response</td>
<td>II-13</td>
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<td>Question &amp; Answer Period</td>
<td>II-14</td>
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<td>From Hostility to Hospitality</td>
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<td>Creative Questions</td>
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<td>Dealing with Emotions</td>
<td>V-41,45</td>
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<td>Assignment to Listen</td>
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<td>Story Listening</td>
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<td>Interview</td>
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<td>Round Robin Interviews</td>
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<td>Debrief Listening Experiences</td>
<td>VII-56</td>
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<td>What Keeps Active People Active</td>
<td>VII-60</td>
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<td>Dealing with Criticism</td>
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<td>Negative Inquiry</td>
<td>VIII-69</td>
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<td>Stop-Action Role Play</td>
<td>VIII-71</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Session VI</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Biblical Images</td>
<td>III-17</td>
<td>15</td>
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<tr>
<td>Form Calling Teams and Unpack Treasures</td>
<td>V-46</td>
<td>18</td>
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<tr>
<td>Calling in the Home</td>
<td>VI-50, VIII-70</td>
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<td>Practice Visit to Inactive Member</td>
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<td>Break (During Practice Visit)</td>
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</table>
### Third Weekend

#### Session VII

- **Warm-Up and Prayer**  
  Manual Ref: VII-56  
  Minutes: 10
- **Calls Round Robin**  
  Manual Ref: VII-56  
  Minutes: 71
- **Break (During Round Robin)**  
  Minutes: 10
- **Gathering of Learnings**  
  Manual Ref: VII-59  
  Minutes: 24
- **Role Renegotiation Model**  
  Manual Ref: VIII-73  
  Minutes: 30
- **Assignment and Closing**  
  Minutes: 5

#### Session VIII

- **Reflecting on the Worship Experience**  
  Minutes: 10
- **Dealing with Resistance**  
  Manual Ref: IX-75  
  Minutes: 15
- **Phone Call**  
  Manual Ref: V-47, IX-76  
  Minutes: 22
- **Story Polarizations**  
  Manual Ref: X-84  
  Minutes: 55
- **Break**  
  Minutes: 15
- **Readiness Grid & Return Tracks**  
  Manual Ref: XI-89, 91  
  Minutes: 20
- **Turtle Interview**  
  Manual Ref: XI-87  
  Minutes: 51
- **Closure Skill**  
  Manual Ref: XI-92  
  Minutes: 22

#### Session IX

- **Life Commandments**  
  Manual Ref: XI-94  
  Minutes: 25
- **Religious Journey**  
  Manual Ref: XII-96  
  Minutes: 92
- **Break (During Round Robin)**  
  Minutes: 10
- **Support Groups**  
  Manual Ref: X-81  
  Minutes: 45
- **Commitment**  
  Minutes: 6
- **Closing of Seminar**  
  Minutes: 10

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"Going Home!" Those words always sound heart-warming, especially when home is a place filled with good memories. The Stone Tower church is home for you. No matter where else life's journey may take you, we still consider you part of the family. Please accept this invitation to join us for the worship services and times of fellowship during the month of June.

Don't Miss This Special Concluding Program!
Sabbath, June 25
Elder John Alspaugh
Sermon. "When The Roll Is Called Up Yonder"
"Invite Someone Home To Dinner" Sabbath After Services
[This is] the history of a young person who, seduced by foolish people, went away from his father, and wandered to another country far distant. The father was sorry to perceive that his son had run away, and in his sorrow roamed the country in all directions during no less than 50 years. In search of his son he came to some great city, where he built a house and dwelt, blest with all that can gratify the five senses... In such a way, the man becomes wealthy; but he gets old, aged, advanced in years, and he passes days and nights always sorrowful in mind on account of his son... Meanwhile that foolish son is wandering from village to village, poor and miserable, seeking food and clothing. When begging, he at one time gets something, another time he doesn't... In course of time he, in his rovings, reaches the town where his father is living, and comes to his father's mansion to beg for food and raiment... The poor man, seeing the splendid mansion of the householder, thinks within himself; "Where am I? This man must be a king or a grandee. Let me not incur some injury, and be caught to do forced labor." With these reflections he hurries away, inquiring after the road to the street of the poor. The rich man on the throne is glad to see his own son, and dispatches messengers with the order to fetch that poor man. The messengers immediately seize the man, but he is no sooner caught than he faints away as he thinks: "These are surely executioners who have approached me; what do I want, clothing or food?" On seeing it the rich, sagacious man thinks; "This ignorant and stupid person is of low position, and will have no faith in my magnificence, nor believe that I am his father." Under these circumstances he orders persons of low character--crooked, one-eyed, maimed, ill-clad and blackish--to go and search that man, who shall do menial work, ordering: "Enter my service, and cleanse the putrid heap of dirt; I will give thee a double salary." On hearing this, the poor man comes and cleanses the said spot; he takes up his abode in a hovel near the mansion... Little by little the owner makes the man enter the house, and employs him in his service for fully twenty years; in this course of which time he lays up in the house gold, pearls, crystal... The ignorant man, who is living outside the mansion alone in a hovel, cherishes no other idea but of poverty, and thinks to himself: "Mine are no such possessions." The rich man, perceiving this of him thinks: "My son has now arrived at the consciousness of being noble." He calls together a gathering of his friends and relatives and says: "I will give all my property to this man." In the midst of the assembly, where the king, burghers, citizens and many merchants are present, he speaks thus: "This is my son whom I lost a long time ago. It is not fully fifty years--and twenty more during which I have seen him--that he has disappeared from such and such a place, and that in search for him I came to this place. He
is owner of all my property; to him I leave it all and entirely; let him do with it what he wants. I give him my whole family property." And the poor man is struck with surprise, remembering his former poverty and his low position; and as he receives these good things of his father's and the family property, he thinks: "Now I am a happy man."

Taken from The Saddharma-Pundarika, a Buddhist book of later date than the Tripitaka.

1Paul A. Eakin, Buddhism and the Christian Approach to Buddhists in Thailand (Bangkok, Thailand, April 1960), pp. 83, 84.
APPENDIX D
BANNERS USED IN THE CARING MINISTRY SEMINAR

1. "Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness. Considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted." Gal 6:1 (seminar general theme)

2. "I looked on my right hand, and beheld, but there was no man that would know me: refuge failed me; no one cared for my soul." Ps 142:4 (exclusion-inclusion exercise)

3. "This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom, but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words." 1 Cor 2:13 (skills overview)

4. "I have strayed like a lost sheep; come, search for thy servant, for I have not forgotten thy commandments." Ps 119:176 (drop-out lecture)

5. "Scorn has broken my heart and has left me helpless: I looked for sympathy, but there was none, for comforters, but I found none." Ps 69:20 (emotions)

6. "Rejoice with them that rejoice, and weep with them that weep. Be of the same mind one toward another." Rom 12:15, 16 (story listening)

7. "If one member suffers all the other members suffer with him and if one member is honored all the members share a common joy." 1 Cor 12:26 (reflecting on the worship service)

8. "I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth." 3 John 4 (what keeps active people active)

9. "All things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation." 2 Cor 5:18 (Biblical images)

10. "The love of God still yearns over the one who has chosen to separate from him, and he sets in operation influences to bring him back to the father's house." Christ's Object Lessons, p. 202 (worship theme)

11. "Be sure you know the condition of your flocks: Give careful attention to your herds." Prov 27:23 (reflecting on the worship service)
12. "Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation." Ps 51:12 (return tracks)

13. "I will set shepherds over them who will care for them, and they shall fear no more, nor be dismayed, neither shall any be missing, says the Lord." Jer 23:4 (support groups)
## APPENDIX E

### MEMBERSHIP CLASSIFICATION CHANGES

Changes in membership occurring during the project

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Membership by categories at start of project</th>
<th>$A^1$</th>
<th>$A^2$</th>
<th>$A^3$</th>
<th>$B$</th>
<th>$C^1$</th>
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<th>$C^3$</th>
<th>Adj.</th>
<th>Total</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Membership categories at start of project</td>
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<td>7</td>
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</table>

- $\uparrow$ = positive change in spiritual life
- $\downarrow$ = negative change in spiritual life
- $\triangle$ = change in life circumstances (moved, change in health, etc.)
- NI = change based on new information the callers learned during their visits
- TO = Transferred out
- Drp = Membership dropped by vote of the church
- Adj - = Total subtracted from that category
- Adj + = Total added to that category
### APPENDIX F

#### TWO-TIER SEMINAR SEQUENCE

**First Weekend**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Session I</th>
<th>Manual Ref</th>
<th>Minutes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction to the Seminar</td>
<td>I-2</td>
<td>10</td>
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<tr>
<td>Choosing Partners and Groups</td>
<td>I-3</td>
<td>30</td>
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<tr>
<td>Inclusion-Exclusion</td>
<td>I-4</td>
<td>25</td>
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<tr>
<td>Break</td>
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<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drop-Out Lecture</td>
<td>II-12</td>
<td>45</td>
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<tr>
<td>Questions and Answers</td>
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<td>20</td>
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<td>Assignment and Closing</td>
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<td>10</td>
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<table>
<thead>
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<th>Session II</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reflecting on the Worship Experience</td>
<td>III-19</td>
<td>15</td>
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<tr>
<td>Communication &amp; Skills Overview</td>
<td>III-19</td>
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<td>Interpersonal Gap</td>
<td>III-21</td>
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<td>Paraphrase</td>
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<td>Perception Check</td>
<td>III-25</td>
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<tr>
<th>Session III</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Story Listening</td>
<td>IV-34</td>
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<td>Interview</td>
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<td>Break</td>
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<tr>
<td>Personal Interviews - Round Robin</td>
<td>IV-38</td>
<td>60</td>
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## Session IV

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<tr>
<td>Worship</td>
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<tr>
<td>What Keeps Active People Active</td>
<td>VII-60</td>
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<td>Creative Questions</td>
<td>III-30</td>
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<td>Break</td>
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<td>Emotions and Feelings</td>
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## Session V

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<tr>
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<td>Criticism and Negative Inquiry</td>
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<tr>
<td>Break</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dealing with Resistance</td>
<td>IX-75</td>
<td>15</td>
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<td>Phone Call</td>
<td>V-47, IX-76</td>
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<td>Calling in the Home</td>
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<td>Calling Teams and Unpacking Treasures</td>
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## Session VI

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<td>Readiness and Returning</td>
<td>XI-89, 91</td>
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<td>Practice Visit to Inactive Member</td>
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<td>115</td>
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(Two- or three-week break between the second and third weekends during which callers visit in the homes of inactive members.)
### Third Weekend

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Session VII</th>
<th>Manual Ref</th>
<th>Minutes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Warm-Up and Prayer</td>
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<td>10</td>
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<tr>
<td>Debrief Calls - Round Robin</td>
<td>VII-56</td>
<td>75</td>
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<tr>
<td>Break (During Round Robin)</td>
<td></td>
<td>10</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gathering of Learnings</td>
<td>VII-59</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using the Bible in the Home</td>
<td>VIII-73</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assignment and Closing</td>
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<td>5</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

| Session VIII | | |
| Reflecting on the Worship Experience | | 10 |
| Story Polarizations | X-84 | 15 |
| Assessment | | 10 |
| Break | | 10 |
| Group Interview | | 25 |
| Closure Skill and Practice | XI-92 | 20 |
| Calling and Support Programs | | 40 |

<p>| Session IX | Manual Ref | Minutes |
| Life Commandments | XI-94 | 25 |
| Religious Journey - Round Robin | XII-96 | 90 |
| Break (During Round Robin) | | 10 |
| Commitment | | 10 |
| Assignment and Closing | | 15 |</p>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Module</th>
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<tr>
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<td>III-17</td>
<td>15</td>
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<tr>
<td>Behavior Description</td>
<td>III-28</td>
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<td>Direct Expression of Feelings</td>
<td>V-45</td>
<td>20</td>
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<tr>
<td>From Hostility to Hospitality</td>
<td>VI-53</td>
<td>15</td>
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<tr>
<td>Neurolinguistics</td>
<td>VI-53</td>
<td>30</td>
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<td>Fogging</td>
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<td>Stop-Action Role Play</td>
<td>VIII-71</td>
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<td>Role Renegotiation Model</td>
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<td>Turtle Interview</td>
<td>XI-87</td>
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<td>Entry Process into the Church</td>
<td>XI-90</td>
<td>15</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*Modules not used in the two-tier format of the seminar can provide good material for the follow-up support sessions.*
APPENDIX G

SCRIPTURES FOR SHARING WITH INACTIVE MEMBERS

1. God's Caring - Our Caring

"The Lord hath appeared of old unto me, saying, Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee." Jer 31:3

"Even when we are too weak to have any faith left, he remains faithful to us and will help us, for he cannot disown us who are part of himself and he will always carry out his promises to us." 2 Tim 2:13 Living Bible

"What do you think? If a man has a hundred sheep, and one of them has gone astray does he not leave the ninety-nine on the hills and go in search of the one that went astray? And if he finds it, truly, I say to you, he rejoices over it more than over the ninety-nine that never went astray. So it is not the will of my Father which is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish." Mat 18:12-14 RSV

"If ye turn again unto the Lord, your brethren and your children shall find compassion before them that lead them captive, so that they shall come again into this land: for the Lord your God is gracious and merciful, and will not turn away his face from you, if ye return unto him." 2 Chron 30:9

"Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness, considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted. Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ." Gal 6:1,2

"Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another; rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep. Be of the same mind one toward another. . . ." Rom 12:10, 15, 16

2. Conversion and Salvation

"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." John 3:16

"God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us." Rom 5:8 NIV
"At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another. But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior." Tit 3:4-6 NIV

"The wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." Rom 6:23

"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." Acts 3:19

"For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast." Eph 2:8,9

"I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me." Gal 2:20

"I will give them an heart to know me, that I am the Lord; and they shall be my people, and I will be their God: for they shall return unto me with their whole heart." Jer 24:7

3. Forgiveness and Returning

"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." 1 John 1:9

"I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and, as a cloud, thy sins: return unto me; for I have redeemed thee." Isa 44:22

"Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near. Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and he will abundantly pardon." Isa 55:6, 7

"All we like sheep have gone astray: we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all." Isa 53:6

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"Turn, 0 backsliding children, saith the Lord; for I am married unto you: and I will take you one of a city, and two of a family, and I will bring you to Zion. Return, ye backsliding children, and I will heal your backslidings. Behold we come unto thee; for thou art the Lord our God." Jer 3:14, 22

"My people are like sheep whose shepherds have let them get lost in the mountains. They have wandered like sheep from one mountain to another, and they have forgotten where their home is." Jer 50:6 NEB

"I have strayed like a lost sheep; come, search for thy servant, for I have not forgotten thy commandments." Ps 119:176 NEB

"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 Liv Bible

4. Acceptance and Assurance

Create in me a clean heart, 0 God; and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from thy presence, and take not thy holy spirit from me. Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation; and uphold me with thy free spirit." Ps 51:10-12

"There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit." Rom 8:1

"All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out." John 6:37

"Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown." Rev 3:11

"This is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people. For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more." Heb 8:10, 12

"Let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful." Heb 10:22, 23 NIV
"This is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life. These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God." 1 John 5:11-13

"Being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus." Phil 1:6 NIV

"Exhort one another daily, while it is still called Today; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence stedfast unto the end." Heb 3:13, 14
APPENDIX H

QUOTATIONS FROM THE WRITINGS OF ELLEN G. WHITE REGARDING MINISTRY TO BACKSLIDERS

1. Members Come and Go Like a Door on Its Hinges

"Today a large part of those who compose our congregations are dead in trespasses and sins. They come and go like the door upon its hinges. For years they have complacently listened to the most solemn, soul-stirring truths, but they have not put them in practice. Therefore they are less and less sensible of the preciousness of truth." Testimonies 6:426

2. Ministers' Responsibility Toward Backsliders

"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. Some are so nearly asleep that they seem to have no sense of the work of a gospel minister. They do not consider that as spiritual physicians they are required to have skill in administering to souls diseased with sin. The work of warning sinners, of weeping over them and pleading with them, has been neglected until many souls are past all cure." Testimonies 2:506

3. Reclaiming Is the Work of Every Member

"If one member of Christ's household falls into temptation, the other members are to look after him with kindly interest, seeking to arrest the feet that are straying into false paths, and win him to a pure, holy life. This service God requires from every member of His church. . . . The members of the Lord's family are to be wise and watchful, doing all in their power to save their weaker brethren from Satan's concealed nets." Evangelism 353

"It is the work of Christ to bring back to God those who have strayed from him, and he requires every member of the church to work together with him in returning the wanderer to the fold." Review & Herald, April 16, 1895
4. Need of Special Help for Those Newly Converted

"But there has been among us as a people a lack of deep, earnest, soul-touching sympathy and love for the tempted and the erring. Many have manifested great coldness and sinful neglect, represented by Christ as passing by on the other side, keeping as far as possible from those who most need help. The newly converted soul often has fierce conflicts with established habits or with some special form of temptation, and, being overcome by some master passion or tendency, he is guilty of indiscretion or actual wrong. It is then that energy, tact, and wisdom are required of his brethren, that he may be restored to spiritual health." Testimonies 5:604, 605

"Those who have newly come to the faith should be patiently and tenderly dealt with, and it is the duty of the older members of the church to devise ways and means to provide help and sympathy and instruction for those who have conscientiously withdrawn from other churches for the truth's sake, and thus cut themselves off from the pastoral labor to which they have been accustomed." Review & Herald, April 28, 1896

"After individuals have been converted to the truth, they need to be looked after. The zeal of many ministers seems to fail as soon as a measure of success attends their efforts. They do not realize that these newly converted ones need nursing,—watchful attention, help, and encouragement. These should not be left alone, a prey to Satan's most powerful temptations; they need to be educated in regard to their duties, to be kindly dealt with, to be led along, and to be visited and prayed with. . ."

"No wonder that some become discouraged, linger by the way, and are left for wolves to devour. Satan is upon the track of all. He sends his agents forth to gather back to his ranks the souls he has lost. There should be more fathers and mothers to take these babes in the truth to their hearts, and to encourage them and pray for them, that their faith be not confused." Testimonies 4:68

5. Lost Sheep Helpless Unless Sought for by Caring Shepherds

"The sheep that has strayed from the fold is the most helpless of all creatures. It must be sought for; for it cannot find its way back. So with the soul that has wandered away from God; he is as helpless as the lost sheep; and unless divine love comes to his rescue, he can never find his way to God. Then with what compassion, what sorrow, what persistence, should the under-shepherd seek for lost souls! How willingly should he endure self-denial, hardship, privation!"
"There is need for shepherds who, under the direction of the Chief Shepherd, will seek for the lost and straying. This means the bearing of physical discomfort and the sacrifice of ease. It means a tender solicitude for the erring, a divine compassion and forbearance. It means an ear that can listen with sympathy to heartbreaking recitals of wrong, of degradation, of despair and misery." Gospel Workers 183, 184

6. Angels Watch How We Deal with Erring

"With intense interest angels are watching to see how man deals with his fellowman. When the heavenly messengers see that we show tender sympathy for the erring, they press close to our side, bringing to our remembrance words that will soothe and comfort the soul. . . . Say not a word, do not a deed, that will drive the erring farther from the Saviour." Australasian Union Conference Record, May 22, 1911

7. No One Ever Reclaimed by Censure

"While very sensitive to the least blame in regard to their own course, many are too severe in dealing with those whom they suppose to be in error. No one was ever reclaimed from a wrong position by censure and reproach; but many are thus driven further from the right path and led to harden their hearts against conviction. A spirit of kindness, a courteous, forbearing deportment may save the erring and hide a multitude of sins." Patriarchs and Prophets 519, 520

8. Not Too Late to Right the Wrongs That Caused People Hurt

"It is not yet too late to redeem the neglects of the past. Let there be a revival of the first love, the first ardor. Search out the ones you have driven away, bind up by confession the wounds you have made. Come close to the great Heart of pitying love, and let the current of that divine compassion flow into your heart and from you to the hearts of others. Let the tenderness and mercy that Jesus has revealed in His own precious life be an example to us of the manner in which we should treat our fellow beings, especially those who are our brethren in Christ. Many have fainted and become discouraged in the great struggle of life, whom one word of kindly cheer and courage would have strengthened to overcome."

Never, never become heartless, cold, unsympathetic, and censorious. Never lose an opportunity to say a word to encourage and inspire hope. We cannot tell how far-reaching may be our tender words of kindness, our Christlike efforts to lighten some burden. The erring can be restored in no other way than in the spirit of meekness, gentleness, and tender love." Testimonies 5:612, 613
9. Those Estranged from God Have No Sense of Their Condition

"The lost coin represents those who are lost in trespasses and sins, but who have no sense of their condition. They are estranged from God, but they know it not. Their souls are in peril, but they are unconscious and unConcerned. In this parable Christ teaches that even those who are indifferent to the claims of God are the objects of His pitying love. They are to be sought for that they may be brought back to God." Christ's Object Lessons 193, 194

10. Appear Indifferent, Yet There Is a Possibility of Saving Them

"God has given a special command that we should regard the stranger, the outcast, and the poor souls who are weak in moral power. Many who appear wholly indifferent to religious things are in heart longing for rest and peace. Although they may have sunk to the very depths of sin, there is a possibility of saving them." Christ's Object Lessons 233

11. A Kind Approach Takes the Erring by Surprise

"Until the judgment you will never know the influence of a kind, considerate course toward the inconsistent, the unreasonable, the unworthy. When we meet with ingratitude and betrayal of sacred trusts, we are roused to show our contempt of indignation. This the guilty expect; they are prepared for it. But kind forbearance takes them by surprise and often awakens their better impulses and arouses a longing for a nobler life." Ministry of Healing 495

12. Love Softens the Hard Heart

"There is need of personal labor for the souls of the lost. In Christlike sympathy we should come close to men individually, and seek to awaken their interest in the great things of eternal life. Their hearts may be as hard as the beaten highway, and apparently it may be a useless effort to present the Saviour to them; but while logic may fail to move, and argument be powerless to convince, the love of Christ, revealed in personal ministry, may soften the stony heart, so that the seed of truth can take root." Christ's Object Lessons 57

13. Angels Help You Reach the Hardened

"When you see those who are going down to death, you will not rest in quiet indifference and ease. The greater their sin and the deeper their misery, the more earnest and tender will be your efforts for their recovery. You will discern the need of those who are suffering, who have been sinning against God,
and who are oppressed with a burden of guilt. Your heart will go out in sympathy for them, and you will reach out to them a helping hand. In the arms of your faith and love you will bring them to Christ. You will watch over and encourage them, and your sympathy and confidence will make it hard for them to fall from their steadfastness.

"In this work all the angels of heaven are ready to co-operate. All the resources of heaven are at the command of those who are seeking to save the lost. Angels will help you reach the most careless and the most hardened. And when one is brought back to God, all heaven is made glad; seraphs and cherubs touch their golden harps, and sing praises to God and the Lamb for their mercy and loving-kindness to the children of men."

Christ's Object Lessons 197

14. Not to Be Discouraged by Those Who Do Not Respond

"We become too easily discouraged over souls who do not at once respond to our efforts. Never should we cease to labor for a soul while there is one gleam of hope. Precious souls cost our self-sacrificing Redeemer too dear a price to be lightly given up to the tempter's power." Ministry of Healing 168

15. The Way of Return May Be Long and Difficult

"The man who deliberately wanders from God in the full blaze of light will find, when he wishes to set his face to return, that briers and thorns have grown up in his path, and he must not be surprised or discouraged if he is compelled to travel long with torn and bleeding feet. The most fearful and most to be dreaded evidence of man's fall from a better state is the fact that it costs so much to get back. The way of return can be gained only by hard fighting, inch by inch, every hour." Selected Messages 2:165

"When one who has wandered far in sin seeks to return to God, he will encounter criticism and distrust. There are those who will doubt whether his repentance is genuine, or will whisper, 'He has no stability; I do not believe that he will hold out.' These persons are doing not the work of God but the work of Satan, who is the accuser of the brethren. Through their criticisms the wicked one hopes to discourage that soul, and to drive him still farther from hope and from God. Let the repenting sinner contemplate the rejoicing in heaven over the return of the one that was lost. Let him rest in the love of God and in no case be disheartened by the scorn and suspicion of the Pharisees." Christ's Object Lessons 190
16. Returning Members Need to Feel They Are Completely Forgiven

"The return of the prodigal son was a source of the greatest joy. The complaints of the elder brother were natural, but not right. Yet this is frequently the course that brother pursues toward brother. There is too much effort to make those in error feel where they have erred, and to keep reminding them of their mistakes. Those who have erred need pity, they need help, they need sympathy. They suffer in their feelings, and are frequently desponding and discouraged. Above everything else, they need free forgiveness." 
Testimonies 3:104

17. The Shepherd Does Not Return Without Sheep

"Thank God, He has presented to our imagination no picture of a sorrowful shepherd returning without the sheep. The parable does not speak of failure but of success and joy in the recovery. Here is the divine guarantee that not even one of the straying sheep of God's fold is overlooked, not one is left unsuccored. Every one that will submit to be ransomed, Christ will rescue from the pit of corruption and from the briers of sin." Christ's Object Lessons 188

18. Joy in Bringing the Lost Sheep Home

"When the lost sheep was found, it was borne home with joy, and much rejoicing followed. This illustrates the blessed, joyful work of laboring for the erring. The church that engages successfully in this work, is a happy church. That man or that woman whose soul is drawn out in compassion and love for the erring, and who labors to bring them to the fold of the Great Shepherd, is engaged in a blessed work. And, oh, what a soul-enrapturing thought, that when one sinner is thus reclaimed, there is more joy in heaven than over ninety and nine just persons!" Life Sketches 187, 188

19. Backsliders Will Return During Last-Day Persecution

"... When the storm of persecution really breaks upon us, the true sheep will hear the true Shepherd's voice. Self-denying efforts will be put forth to save the lost, and many who have strayed from the fold will come back to follow the great Shepherd." Testimonies 6:401
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