



Reclaiming Disconnected Members

Reclaiming the One, Securing the Ninety and Nine

By Dr. Everton A. Ennis

Three Ideals to Ponder

1. How wonderful it would be if there were no missing members!

2. That the number of missing members was nowhere near to what it is!

3. That if when we reach out to them, they would simply accept our efforts and immediately return

NAD Statistics on Missing Members

“A topic of concern that (Dr. Alex) Bryant said pierces straight to his heart is the number of members who have left, as well as the number of ‘missing.’ As is true throughout the world church, almost half of those baptized into the church end up leaving. Bryant said this is a topic of great concern that the NAD is taking seriously, and they are working on strategies to help prevent this loss, and to bring those who have left back into the fold. ‘If we focused on keeping those we baptized, it would fill every church pew in North America,’ he said.”

Quoted in Spectrum Magazine, Nov. 2018

3 Things to Bear in Mind When Seeking to Reclaim Missing Members

- Reclaiming is a sacred endeavor that Jesus commands and endorses.
 - Caution and wisdom must be utilized to make sure that we do not irrationally or unwisely pursue **unrepentant people** who God has removed in order to cleanse or protect the church.
 - As we earnestly reach out to missing members, it is very important to respect their right to no longer be members of the SDA church (or your local congregation), should they so choose.
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Reclamation Ministry Is a Sacred Endeavor

- Jesus' parable of the lost coin, lost sheep, and lost son - Luke 15
- **Securing the 99** to go searching for the 1 lost sheep – Matt 18:10-14
- Interestingly, this parable of the 99 secured and 1 missing sheep is found just before Jesus' teaching on **conflict resolution** in vs. 15-20



Be Careful Who You Pursue!

- Beware of wolves in sheep's clothing who would devour the flock if allowed to return! Too many churches are protecting the wolves instead of the sheep!
- Some people leave the church because they could not control it, and if brought back in, would simply repeat past behavior that hurts the members and mission of the church!
- Much prayer is needed to determine who God is wanting to reconnect to the body of Christ – do not forget that there are sheep and there are goats and there are wolves in sheep's clothing!

Respect the Right of People to No Longer Be Members

- People have the right to no longer be members of any church, in the same way that they made a personal decision to become members
- Sometimes there are very personal reasons why people leave a particular church or congregation, and it may not have anything to do with members or issues in the congregation
- While we should encourage, invite and even urge people to return, at no time should anyone be made to feel forced to do what they have the right to not do





The right to choose not to be a member means that removing names from the membership roll is going to be one component of our reclamation effort. The church should not retain names on the roll when it is clear that the person has made their decision to no longer be a member.

Names Can Be Removed for 3 Reasons

- Church Discipline (the most commonly utilized reason – see Church Manual, p. 63, 66)
- Missing and unaccounted for members may be removed after 2 years (see Church Manual, p. 66)
- Resignation from the Membership (see Church Manual, p. 66)



The Mindset Needed for Reconnecting Missing Members

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Reconnecting Missing
Members

Remember that
#GodRestores

The Mindset Needed for
Reconnecting Missing
Members

Remember that Jesus
died for the sins of
every single person

The Mindset Needed for
Reconnecting Missing
Members

Remember that the
Church is His, not ours

The Mindset Needed for
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Members

Remember that we are
sinners too, therefore
no sense of haughtiness
is appropriate

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Remember that sometimes painful decisions may have to be made on a name, but such decisions must be made in order to honor biblical instruction and personal choices

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Remember that this is not a personal matter, and that there must be strict adherence to biblical principle and protocols as outlined in the Church Manual if removal must be recommended

The Mindset Needed for
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Members

Remember to treat every name as if it's our very own name that was being discussed, and we aren't in the room

Recommended Steps to Take to Begin the Process of Reclaiming Missing Members

Step #1 – Church Board Meeting

- Discuss at Church Board meeting
- Appoint a select group of spiritual leaders to pray for guidance
- No member of this prayer team should currently have any unresolved personal conflict with any missing member
- Church Board may appoint or the church may elect a Reconnecting Ministry Team (alternately, the Board of Elders may be tasked with this duty, if deemed advisable)

Step #2 – The Reconnecting Team Meets

- Compile and discuss the list of missing members at the 1st meeting
- It may be helpful to arrange the names by categories of reasons for leaving or why they are missing, such as: conflict or loss of confidence, doctrinal disagreement or inadequate grounding, personal failure, personal hardship, family issues, occupation or school, and reasons unknown
- Assign Reconnecting Team Members to each category of missing members based on Team Members' spiritual gifts
- Ideally, the Pastor should chair this particular meeting, but another may chair beyond this point, at the Pastor's discretion

Step #3 – Provide Necessary Training

- Never assume that Reconnecting Team members know what to do in every regard, even though they have been assigned categories of members based on their spiritual gifts
- Basic training should be provided to the team as a whole on how to relate to various aspects of the reclamation process
- Specific training should be provided in how to relate to the assigned category of reasons
- All team members are working for the same goal, hence there should be no spirit of competition but one of holy camaraderie

Step #4 – Deploy, Execute, Evaluate

- The Reconnecting Team should meet periodically (as agreed) with the Pastor to report and evaluate the progress
- This is a good time for team members to request the Pastor's assistance in specific cases where he or she might be able to help
- It may also be advisable for the Pastor to refer the case to a ministry leader (Community Services, Stewardship, Family Ministry, etc.), based on the particular need
- There may be times when direct pastoral or other professional intervention might be advisable

Step #5 – Seek to Conclude Each Case

- Once contact has been established with a missing member, it is imperative that we change the nomenclature to something else (try detached, estranged, withdrawn, etc) – I will use detached here
- While not suggesting that we give up on any detached member who we are working with, do not by any means accommodate indefinitely open cases, as this will weary the team members and more than likely serve to enable the detached member in his or her chosen path
- At some point (left to the discretion of the Reconnecting Team as a whole), a decision must be made to conclude or suspend the case

Step #6 – Concluding Each Case Quickly

- Those who could not be contacted after every effort has been exhausted (and who have been missing for at least 2 years) may at this point be referred to the Church Board for removal
- The detached who choose to remain detached may be presented with the course that the Reconnecting Team may now follow – to recommend removal (this is not a threat or incentive for action)
- Those who willingly choose to reconnect should be congratulated, celebrated and meet with the Pastor to assess the way forward (recommitment by baptism may be necessary, or if moral and public living had remained consistent with the faith - communion)

Reducing the Falling Away Among Members

- A Place of Grace
- Engage-CONNECT Ministry
- Develop a Social Events Church
- Minister to Needs
- Be a Community-focused Church



Questions

