Redemptive Membership Review Process

Gerson P. Santos, DMin
General Conference Associate Secretary
Then Jesus told them this parable: "Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Doesn’t he leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it? And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbors together and says, ‘Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.’

Luke 15:3-6
Redemptive Membership Review Process

Jesus called us to make disciples
Local churches should aim to
- create a warm and caring environment for spiritual growth
- encourage all ministries of the church to be united in making mature and faithful disciples
- develop strategy to reclaim former and inactive members through:
  (1) regular redemptive membership review process and
  (2) reclaiming ministries
Membership review provides more effective pastoral care based on establishing accurate membership records. Nevertheless, it must have a redemptive purpose of seeing people through numbers.
The Church Manual, on page 61, states:

Redemptive Membership Review — Membership records are kept up to date by the local church. They are subject to review by the next higher organization. This rule, which also applies to every entity or level of the organization, provides the maximum privacy of members’ personal information and shall comply with legal requirements.
In the period 1965 through 2021, 42,294,215 people have been members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Of those, 17,594,544 have chosen to leave. Our net loss rate is 42%. In effect, 4 of every 10 church members are slipping away.
What Happened When I Stopped Attending Church

- 40% No one contacted me
- 19% A church member came to visit me
- 17% A local elder came to visit me
- 15% A local church member contacted me by phone
- 10% An Adventist relative made contact
- 9% The pastor came to visit me
- 6% The pastor contacted me by phone or Email
- 3% An Adventist, not a local member contacted me
- 2% I received a letter in the mail
- 0.3% Printed material was mailed to me
Children from Adventist families

13x more likely

Jim Epperson
Southern Union
N=844
Center for Creative Ministry Study

Lapsed & Ex-Members
- SDA Education: 0.2
- Other Education: 1

Current Members
- SDA Education: 0.6
- Other Education: 0

AGE WHEN FIRST STARTED ATTENDING THE ADVENTIST CHURCH

- 26% UNDER AGE 10
- 23% AGES 10-17
- 38% AGES 18-29
- 9% AGES 30-39
- 5% AGE 40 AND OLDER
- 5% UNDER AGE 10
STAGE OF LIFE AT DEPARTURE

- Young Adult: 63.5%
- Middle Age: 35.1%
- Child (Never Baptized): 1.3%
- Old Age: 0.1%
LEVEL OF ENGAGEMENT BEFORE LEAVING

- **OBSERVER**: 41.9%
- **PARTICIPANT**: 25.7%
- **LEADER**: 11.9%
FAULTY DISCIPLEMAKING

WE ARE FAILING ON MAKING DISCIPLES
Caring about people

“The shepherd who discovers that one of his sheep is missing does not look carelessly upon the flock…. He counts and recounts the flock. When he is sure that one sheep is lost, he slumbers not... He makes every effort to find that one lost sheep… The parable does not speak of failure but of success and joy in the recovery.”

COL, 146
“If the lost sheep is not brought back to the fold, it wanders until it perishes. And many souls go down to ruin for want of a hand stretched out to save.”

Christ’s Object Lessons, p. 191
CARING ABOUT PEOPLE

The main purpose of the membership review is not to clean the books but to offer more effective pastoral care.
“Our primary goal is not to boast about the percentage of members present, but to reach the unsaved in our community and to care for the inactive in our fellowship. We’re not caring for someone when we prune them from our rolls. We simply lose contact and opportunity for ministry.”

Kenneth S. Hemphill
The rescue starts with the counting of the flock:

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Christ’s Object Lessons, pp. 187-188
Local Church

1. Special Revision Committee and membership classification
2. Church Board should follow a frequent examination of the auxiliary lists, implementing strategies to involve each member in disciple-making of each category.
3. The church clerk’s role is crucial to prepare the auxiliary lists and implement membership review.
Redemptive Membership Review
Process

#1 Electronic Membership System

#2 Membership Classification

1. Frequently attending members,
2. Non-frequently attending members,
3. Attending another SDA congregation,
4. Whereabouts unknown (missing),
5. Members to rescue (missing).

#3 Permanent Membership Review

Reclaiming Ministry
Local Field

1. Training for church clerks, leaders, and members for membership review and reclaiming ministries
2. Implementing an electronic membership system to identify real people
3. Taking administrative decision to “close the gap”
4. Planing to progressively close the gap by “adjustments”
5. Keeping organizational records consolidated with local church membership
Division/Union

1. To have a designated DMR coordinator and a DMR committee chaired by one of the officers and including departmental directors.
2. To have an overall plan to improve the audited membership retention rate and a 20% increase in church attendance.
3. To have and implement an active disciple-making plan, according to their context, to increase evangelism, assimilation, and leadership development.
4. To hold conferences on nurture, retention, reclaiming and disciple-making.
5. To implement approved membership software in 75% of unions to improve records of local church membership.
6. Specific training in nurture, retention, reclaiming and disciple-making to be part of all ministerial and theological education programs.
7. To update its membership as their units follow the process, not waiting for all the units to finish the process.
General Conference

1. The General Conference has an active Disciple-making and Reclaiming Committee to support worldwide initiatives on discipleship, retention, and reclaiming ministries.

2. General Conference Departments, in collaboration with one another and in consultation with division leaders, share materials that meet expressed needs in nurture, retention, disciple-making, and reclaiming ministries.
Terms of Reference

1. Recommend proposals for improving the retention rate
2. Facilitate plans that address “I Will Go” objectives
3. Identify, assess, and promote strategies and resources
4. Promote a clear and comprehensive vision for discipleship, nurture, and retention.
Caring about people

“The shepherd who discovers that one of his sheep is missing does not look carelessly upon the flock…. He counts and recounts the flock. When he is sure that one sheep is lost, he slumbers not... He makes every effort to find that one lost sheep… The parable does not speak of failure but of success and joy in the recovery.”

COL, 146