

## **Reclaiming the Lost**

### **Bible Passages:**

Romans 10:17 “Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ.”

Hebrews 10:24,25 “Let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another – and all the more as you see the day approaching.”

Matthew 18:15 “If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector.”

Luke 15:6,7 “...Then he calls his friends and neighbors together and says, ‘Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.’ I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent.”

Luke 17:3 “So watch yourselves. If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him.”

I Timothy 2:3,4 “This is good, and pleases God our Savior, who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.”

### **Objective:**

To retain our active membership, and to reclaim as many delinquent members as possible by personally speaking to and inviting back to worship those who have professed faith in the teachings of God’s Word but have separated themselves from the blessings of hearing the Word, receiving forgiveness through the Sacraments, and serving God through the church.

### **Rationale:**

Many of our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ are delinquent in regular church attendance. “Almost 500 members did not worship during the four-week survey. On the average only 34% of the membership is in worship each week.” This was the 2<sup>nd</sup> lowest attendance percentage that Parish Assistance Director, Pastor Ron Heins, had seen. This far below average church attendance should deeply concern all of us. When our Christian brothers and sisters neglect the Word of God that is heard in church each week, they are guilty of sin and are in danger of severing themselves from Christ. We must remember that it is by coming to church and hearing and studying the Word of Christ, that God brings us to faith and keeps us in the faith (Romans 10:17).

**During the next seven years:**

**To make this vision a reality:**

1. We envision a stronger effort being made to retain both established and new members (including new confirmands).
  - a. The pastors will shepherd new members into core Bible classes. (Cf. Adult Spiritual Growth)
  - b. The Elders together with the Pastors will establish a list of families and/or individuals willing to serve as Host Families. (A host family will welcome and channel them into areas of their interest, watch over health, hospitalizations, births, transportation needs, financial concerns, etc and will be the first contact should a worship pattern change be noticed.)
  - c. The Elders will keep **accurate worship and communion attendance records** for identifying irregular worship attendance patterns. Currently we are doing this with our *Friendship Register*, and a computer-based tracking system.
  
2. We envision a means in place to comprehensively monitor worship attendance and address other needs for all of our family of believers.
  - a. The congregation will be divided geographically into 30 areas consisting of approximately 15 families. Each Host Family will be assigned an area. Among the duties listed in 1b, the host family will monitor church mailboxes and deliver the contents if nothing has been picked up for a period of one month. They will also be the first responder should a change in attendance pattern be noted. Training will be provided for those interested in serving. (Cf. Appendix 1 Facilities)
  
3. We envision a strong effort being implemented in reclaiming the strayed and straying.
  - a. Should the initial contact by Host Family be unsuccessful, and/or attendance records indicate their worship/communion pattern has not improved, the straying member's name(s) is (are) forwarded to the Pastors/Elders/Elder Assistants for further attention.
  - b. Because this number may be large, a group of 20 spiritually gifted men and women will be trained by the pastors and Elders to assist them in this time consuming and important work of reclaiming the lost. This group will be called the Elder Assistants.
  - c. The Pastors and Elders will use a systematic strategy for contacting the **long term inactive**, remembering that all admonishment levels for the straying be used out of love and in the spirit of returning the strays to the flock. We recommend the first visit, by Pastors/Elders/Elder Assistants, be only for listening to the strayed person to better understand their situation. (Continued on next page)

A second visit will

- ✠ Explain the church's concern for them,
- ✠ Stress love and encouragement from the Gospel as well as the Law,
- ✠ Remind that they are sinners in need of a Savior,
- ✠ Remind them that faith in their Savior comes to them through His Word and Sacraments.
- ✠ Remind them that they are despising His sacrifice when they ignore His Word and Sacraments,
- ✠ Remind them that Christ paid for their sins

Follow up visits may be necessary. They will then receive a letter saying what has previously been done to reclaim the lost.

- d. Finally, when every loving effort has been made to return the strayed back to the Word and Sacraments, and the person still rejects the private admonition, the entire congregation should then be informed. After every member of the congregation has had an opportunity to show love to the strayed person by encouraging him or her to return to church, and he or she still doesn't repent, excommunication should be considered.
- e. Excommunication is an appropriate and loving way of calling the impenitent to repentance. We should not neglect patient admonition of the strayed, but we should not hesitate to use excommunication when it is called for.
- f. When the members return, the Host Family will reinforce his or her reestablished attendance.

## Conclusion

*The Third Commandment*

Remember the Sabbath Day and keep it holy.

*What does this mean?*

We should fear and love God that we do not despise preaching and his Word, but regard it as holy, and gladly hear and learn it

