

FORMER AND INACTIVE MEMBER VISITATION PROGRAM

INTRODUCTION: A field-tested visitation program for contacting former and inactive members. The following method, when carefully pursued, has yielded 25-50 return in attendance of former members.

HOW TO GET STARTED

1. Carefully assemble a current list of your church's former and inactive members. Be certain all addresses are current.
2. Present this list to your prayer groups, prayer meeting, Church Elders, etc. for earnest prayer over a period of several weeks.
3. Dedicate a specific time for contacting these names. It's best to start at least three months before the evangelistic series to allow time for two or three contacts.
4. Assign teams of two or three members to visit each home. This can be done during "Soup and Salvation" evening.
5. Meet at other times, when necessary with the visiting teams for reflection and prayer.

I-First Visit

Keep in mind the following outlines 3 sample visits per home over 60 days, however more contacts than these will likely be needed to fully "re-connect" the family to church attendance and activities. Then begin contacting them with the following approach:

"Hello, is this where the Greens live? (Be sure to establish that this is the party you're looking for.) Then say, "I'm Joe Applebee and this is Jim Smith. We're from the (Name of Church) Seventh-day Adventist Church and are out to say hello today to all the folks who've ever attended our church, and we certainly didn't want to miss you folks." (Smile)

"We'd just like to come into your home for five minutes and have prayer for your home and family. Is that OK?" (It is very difficult for a former or non-attending member to refuse prayer! And please don't go over the five minute commitment)

Enter the home, ask a few simple questions about the family, perhaps where each one works or attends school and the names and ages of all the children. Make a careful note of each name, and then at the end of five minutes pray for that family, mentioning each name and any particular needs in your prayer. Be sure to pray in a kind and loving tone of voice.

After prayer, simply say, *"Mr. and Mrs. Green, it has been so good to visit with you for a moment. I hope we can come back again sometime."* Chat another minute or two on the way out, then LEAVE!

II - Second Visit

Two weeks after the first visit

Begin by saying, *"Hello, Mrs. Green, remember us? We're from the church. We wanted to get back and visit you again."* (Usually at this point they'll let you in. If not, ask, "May we come in?")

Take time at the beginning of each visit for pleasantries and the building of rapport. Talk about pictures on the wall or the beautiful yard. Ask how each member of the family is doing. (you previously noted on your visitation card the names of each family member.)

After these pleasantries, say something like this: *"You know, brother and sister Green, we were just talking the other day about the need for our church to do a better job in this community. We were saying, 'How can we be more effective in our ministry to this area?' And then we thought, 'who is better qualified to tell us than folks who used to attend regularly. We would really appreciate your opinion on this one. How can we do a better job as a church in this community?'"* (Give them plenty of time to respond.) Usually they'll respond by telling you why they left the church. Let them do as much of the talking as possible. Just be a good listener, nodding assent when it's appropriate and occasionally clarifying their comments with a brief question. Remember always to be kind and keep a loving tone in your voice.

With much kindness and love in your approach, you should be able to learn a great deal at this visit. The idea is to learn something about their relationship to the church without getting too personal. Remember, love and listening are the keys! At the end of the visit, ask if they would like you to pray for anything in particular. (Listen carefully, their prayer requests may speak volumes!) Then close with prayer, mentioning the needs expressed. (Note: This visit can be longer, perhaps 30 minutes.)

III –Third Visit

Two weeks after the second visit

Start the visit with the usual pleasantries. You are somewhat acquainted with the Greens by now, so you have quite a bit to talk about. Do not appear hurried or over anxious to get to your agenda. Then get to the point of your visit by saying something like this: "**Jim and Nancy, I was just wondering, do you folks still believe quite a bit like the Adventists do?**" (Don't say "**Why haven't you been attending?**" or "**What is it that you don't believe?**") Keep the approach positive. Often they will respond favorably to this question. If they do not, they will usually mention one thing that's holding them back. Be prepared to address this one thing briefly and with great sensitivity.

If they say they still believe, ask "**Have you ever thought of coming back?**" Usually their answer will again be "yes." At this point, give them, Memories, by Lewis Walton, with these words, "**Here is a something beautiful that touched me and I know you'll appreciate. It's only got about 400 words and takes around 4 minutes to read. I'd really be interested in your reaction to this. Here's a copy for you. Suppose we just read our copies for the next three or four minutes silently together and then compare notes.**" If you just leave them the letter, they often don't read it; but you are asking them to read it through now. It's a powerful, compelling testimony for former members.

When they've finished reading, ask "**How do you feel about this little book?**" If the response is favorable, say, "**Jim and Nancy, I know you still believe this great Advent message. We have good Sabbath program planned this week.**" Mention any special features during Sabbath School and church; special music, the sermon, fellowship luncheon, etc. "**We'd sure be happy to have you there. Won't you come with us?**" Help them surmount any difficulties such as transportation, etc.

Finally, call them Thursday or Friday evening, reminding them of their Sabbath Appointment. Tell them you'll be watching for them. Ask them to eat with you at the potluck afterwards. Don't be discouraged if they don't attend yet. Keep visiting them socially. Win their trust and confidence as friends. Invite them for dinner at your home. By and by they will come!

ANSWERING OBJECTIONS

Perhaps on the second visit, you get a look or body language that seems to say, "Oh no, not these people again." Years ago I learned the following response which has served over the years: "Jim and Nancy, put yourself in my place for a moment, and I'll put myself in your place. Suppose you had visited me before, but we hadn't seen you at church yet, would you just give up on me or would you visit me just one more time? I think I know what you would do, and that's what we're doing today, coming back one more time. We haven't forgotten you. Could we just come in and have prayer together?"

However, if people are extremely rude, they are not interested at this time. Don't offend them further by "pushy" attitude. Just say, "**Remember, Jesus cares about you and so do we.**" Keep visiting other families. Eventually you'll find others more responsive.

WHAT TO DO NOW?

1. Encourage your members to keep turning in the information forms. Form a small committee of about 15 or 20 people who will "brainstorm" and think of as many names of former and non-attending members as possible and write them all on a whiteboard. For each person who suggests a name, give them a form on the spot. And ask them to fill it out and return it before they leave. In this "committee" fashion, you can gather 25-75 or more names within an hour.
2. Continue gathering names and assign these names to the teams now in place.
3. Organize a group who will visit these former members on Sabbath afternoon and at the midweek "Soup and Salvation" evening.
4. As you come to the final visit with these former members, be certain they Have a brochure and your personal invitation to attend the meetings with you.

SOUP AND SALVATION

Order of Program

- 5:30-6:30 Supper (soup, salad, bread, drink, etc.)
- 6:30-6:50 Gather for brief instructional session.
- 6:50-7:00 Organize into teams of two and assign territory.
- 7:00-8:00 Teams visit and invite persons to meetings, etc. For each visitation team, have at least one praying back at the church for them until they return to the church.
- 8:30-9:00 Meet back at the church for sharing time and prayer.