Membership Audit: A Tool for Nurture and Retention

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- **Net Losses**
- **Net Accessions**
Since 1965, there have been 34,385,004 church members. Of those, 13,737,025 (or more) have chosen to leave the church.

Our net loss rate is 39.95%

In effect, at least four members have slipped away for every ten who were in the church.
Global lost: dropped vs. missing, 1965–2016

Global dropped: 6,500,914

Global missing and unknown: 7,236,111

Global missing and unknown are 111.31% of the dropped
Life Events in the Year Leading Up to Decision to Stop Attending

- Serious illness: 15%
- Married/ divorced: 10%
- Moved to new town: 11%
- Death in family: 10%
- Marital conflict: 8%
- Graduation: 7%
- Job change: 7%
- Famine-poverty: 6%
- Illness in family: 6%
- Lost job: 3%
- Birth or adoption: 2%
- Child left home: 1%
- Legal problems: 1%
- Immigrated: 0.4%
- Disaster or war: 0.3%
- Other: 8%
Most Important Reasons Why Decided to Stop Attending

• 28% No big issue; I just drifted away
• 25% Lack of compassion for the hurting
• 19% Moral failure on my part
• 18% I did not fit in
• 14% Too much focus on minor issues
• 13% Conflict in the congregation
• 12% Moral failures of members
• 11% Moral failures of leaders
• 11% Pressure from family or friends
• 10% Race, ethnic or tribal issues
Most Important Reasons Why Decided to Stop Attending

- 8% Few members of my age group
- 7% Legalistic attitudes
- 6% Pastor was dictatorial
- 6% Church did not do much to help the poor
- 5% I did not believe some doctrines
- 5% Unrealistic demands on members
- 4% Low standards
- 3% The worship was not very spiritual
- 3% Too much asking for money
- 2% Church voted to drop me from membership
- 1% Apostate ideas were promoted
What event triggered your decision to leave?

- Perceived hypocrisy in other church members
- Marital difficulties
- Lack of friends in the church
- High level of conflict in the church
- Personal conflict with local church
- Personal conflicts about Adventist doctrines
- Moved to a new city/church
- Divorce
- Dislike of worship style
- Dislike of local church
- Decisions taken by higher leaders
- Personal conflict with pastor
- Dislike of preaching/service
- Local pastor moved to another congregation
- Death of family member(s)
- Death of other family member(s)
- Other
What Happened When They 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
Is your name still on the membership list?

- Not sure: 60%
- Yes: 23%
- No: 16%
Did you decide to withdraw or were you expelled from the church?

- My decision: 40%
- Decided by others: 8%
- Never discussed with me: 52%
Pastors need to be equipped and trained—and then they can train elders and church-members.

In light of these statistics, which show pastors engage very little with members who stop attending church, it is not surprising to find that 53% of global pastors say they never received training in nurturing and retaining members in their first degrees; the same proportion (53%) say that they also received no training in these areas in postgraduate study.
Religious Affiliation After Stopped Attending Church

- 40.38% nominal Adventist, inactive
- 8.66% active in other Christian...
- 2.29% inactive in other Christian...
- 15.67% "not religious but spiritual"
- 0.76% member of other religion
- 7.13% don't know
- 7.01% drifting
- 8.79% none
Awareness of Developments in Adventism

- No knowledge: 12.10%
- Hear things occasionally: 32.61%
- Fairly knowledgeable: 27.90%
- Detailed knowledge: 17.58%
Sources of Information

- Spectrum: 0%
- Adventist Today: 5%
- Adventist Review: 10%
- Adventist News Network: 15%
- Division, union, or conference: 20%
- Adventist friends: 25%
- Adventist family: 30%
- Voice of Prophecy: 35%
- Adventist World Radio: 40%
- It is Written: 45%
- 3ABN: 50%
- Breath of Life: 50%
- Faith for Today: 50%
- The Quiet Hour: 50%
- Amazing Facts: 50%
- Loma Linda Broadcasting Network: 50%
- Local Adventist radio station: 50%
- Other: 10.83%

- Adventist family: 43.69%
- Voice of Prophecy: 37.71%
- Adventist World Radio: 12.10%
- It is Written: 3.82%
- 3ABN: 3.82%
- Breath of Life: 0.51%
- Local Adventist radio station: 0.51%
- Other: 2.55%

- Adventist friends: 6.62%
- Voice of Prophecy: 4.59%
- Adventist family: 2.92%
- Adventist World Radio: 3.18%
- It is Written: 3.82%
- 3ABN: 0.51%
- Local Adventist radio station: 0.51%
- Other: 2.55%

- Adventist family: 3.82%
- Voice of Prophecy: 5.99%
- Adventist World Radio: 8.28%
- It is Written: 5.35%
- 3ABN: 1.27%
- Local Adventist radio station: 2.55%
- Other: 4.46%

- Adventist family: 2.17%
- Voice of Prophecy: 3.31%
- Adventist World Radio: 11.21%
- It is Written: 4.59%
- 3ABN: 4.59%
- Local Adventist radio station: 6.62%
- Other: 5.99%

- Adventist family: 0.51%
- Voice of Prophecy: 0.51%
- Adventist World Radio: 2.55%
- It is Written: 5.35%
- 3ABN: 1.27%
- Local Adventist radio station: 2.55%
- Other: 4.46%
How do you presently feel about Adventism? (Former Members)

- Happy memories, “but not for me anymore” (56%)
- Bittersweet (18%)
- Don’t care (17%)
- Hostile (5%)
- Actively opposed (4%)
How would you rate your openness to reconnect? (Former Members)

- Likely: 36%
- Somewhat likely: 21%
- Somewhat unlikely: 12%
- Very unlikely: 12%
- Depends on circumstances of approach: 19%
1 Chron. 21: 1–2, 7

“Now Satan stood up against Israel and moved David to number Israel. So David said ... to the leaders of the people, ‘Go number Israel from Beersheba to Dan, and bring the number to me ... And God was displeased with this thing; therefore He struck Israel.”
“It was pride and ambition that prompted this action of the king. The numbering of the people would show the contrast between the weakness of the kingdom when David ascended the throne and its strength and prosperity under his rule.”
Have we sometimes counted our church members not out of pastoral concern, but out of pride?

Have we looked to our own strength, rather than to God’s?

But *membership audit should be redemptive*
Luke 15:4–6

“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.’

“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.”
“The shepherd who discovers that one of his sheep is missing, does not look ... on the flock that is safely housed, and say, “I have ninety and nine, and it will cost me too much trouble to go in search of the straying one. Let him come back and I will open the door ... and let him in.” No; no sooner does the sheep go astray than the shepherd is filled with grief
Lessons from the Spirit of Prophecy

and anxiety. He counts and recounts the flock. When he is sure that one sheep is lost, he slumbers not. He leaves the ninety and nine ... and goes in search of the straying sheep. The darker ... the night, and the more perilous the way, the greater is the shepherd’s anxiety, and the more earnest his search. He makes every effort to find that one lost sheep.”

*Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 187
God’s desired retention rate? 100%

We are missing many more than one sheep out of every hundred.

Are we unwilling to follow our Lord and Saviour’s example?
2 Corinthians 13:11
Finally, brothers and sisters, rejoice! Strive for full restoration, encourage one another, be of one mind, live in peace. And the God of love and peace will be with you.
James 5: 19–20

My brothers and sisters, if one of you should wander from the truth and someone should bring that person back, remember this: Whoever turns a sinner from the error of their way will save them from death, and cover over a multitude of sins.
“In the parable the shepherd goes out to search for one sheep—the very least that can be numbered. So if there had been but one lost soul, Christ would have died for that one.”

Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 187
What should we do?

Recommendations
What next?

• Attendance should be monitored so pastors, elders and members can know who is at risk

• Some see this as controversial; but physicians use temperature, pulse, and blood pressure to measure health

• So in measuring congregational health, we need to know membership, tithe and attendance

• And only by monitoring who attends can we act preemptively, to stop members slipping away
What next?

• Membership audits need to be carried out

• *Not* to get rid of members or “purify” the flock—
  that is not the methodology of the Good Shepherd

• *Rather* we seek to identify and register those who,
  in their own minds, have *already left*

• In approaching members who have not been seen
  for many years, ask not: “Do you want your name
  taken off the books?”
What next?

• Make contact with former members of your local church—offer an apology for anything you or other church members may have done to offend and tell them they are always welcome.

• Even if the pastor or church isn’t at fault!

• Tell them: “We want you to come back. What can we do to help you?”

• And when former (or current!) members who have not attended church for a while do come, welcome them, like the father of the prodigal son.
First global Summit on Nurture, Retention, and Discipling

All the presentations given at the 2013 World Summit on Nurture, Retention, and Discipling are available:
http://www.adventistresearch.org/nurture_home
(along with audio recordings of the discussion sessions that followed each presentation)
http://www.adventistresearch.org/research_reports:
Under “Retention Studies”:
Full reports on the two studies of former and inactive members that are summarised in this presentation

http://www.adventistresearch.org/astr_presentations
Copies of David Trim’s reports to Annual Council in 2014 & 2015, which draw out key findings and statistics
Other Resources

http://southern.libguides.com/c.php?g=490463&p=3853417:
A report on American graduates of Adventist universities &
their sense of connectedness to the Seventh-day Adventist
Church

http://www.adventistresearch.org/sites/default/files/files/Revised%20Adventist%20Youth-Connected%20and
%20Disconnected%20Oct%202013.pdf
A presentation by Galina Stele which brings together data,
from several studies, on young Adventists around the world
and factors affecting their retention