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# The Caring Ministry: Concepts and Methods of Ministry to Inactive Members of the Stone Tower Seventh-day Adventist Church, Portland, Oregon

John C. Alspaugh

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ABSTRACT

THE CARING MINISTRY: CONCEPTS AND METHODS OF  
MINISTRY TO INACTIVE MEMBERS OF THE  
STONE TOWER SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST  
CHURCH, PORTLAND, OREGON

by

John C. Alspaugh

Chairman: Steven P. Vitrano

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ABSTRACT OF GRADUATE STUDENT RESEARCH

Project Report

Andrews University

Theological Seminary

Title: THE CARING MINISTRY: CONCEPTS AND METHODS OF MINISTRY TO  
INACTIVE MEMBERS OF THE STONE TOWER SEVENTH-DAY  
ADVENTIST CHURCH, PORTLAND, OREGON

Name of researcher: John C. Alspaugh

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Date completed: April 1986

Problem

One of the greatest needs in the Seventh-day Adventist Church today is to develop a ministry to inactive members. In recent years many studies have explored the reasons why people leave the church, but very little has been done to reclaim those who become discouraged or disenchanted. The purpose of this project was to establish such a ministry to inactive members of Stone Tower Church and to evaluate the effectiveness of John Savage's "Calling and Caring Ministries" for use among Seventh-day Adventists.

### Method

Lay members were trained in the concepts, skills, and methods of the Caring Ministry. Callers then visited the inactive members, seeking ways to minister to their needs and reestablish their relationship with the church. The project evaluation was written following qualitative methodology wherein the callers evaluated the training seminar, reflected on their own learning and growth, and reported the response of the inactive members.

### Results

Seminar participants evaluated the training program as a valuable experience in understanding the dropout and acquiring skills for visitation ministry. They reacted positively to learning and practicing in small groups and appreciated the spirit of bonding and unity which gave them motivation and support.

Participants expressed concern over the length of time and amount of material compressed into the seminar and a perceived emphasis on knowledge, psychology and skills.

The callers' visits resulted in thirty members becoming more active in the life of the church. The callers' perspectives contributed a number of suggestions to improve the seminar and visitation program.

### Conclusions

The Caring Ministry seminar and visitation program is a valuable instrument in establishing a ministry to inactive members. It can be even more effective when conducted in a two-tier format where callers learn basic skills and then are

immediately involved in visitation. When they return for the balance of the training, the callers will be better prepared to assimilate the concepts and skills while keeping this knowledge in a context of ministry and mission. The Caring Ministry program can be furthered strengthened by adapting it the unique needs of Seventh-day Adventists--both dropouts and callers.

Andrews University  
Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

THE CARING MINISTRY: CONCEPTS AND METHODS OF  
MINISTRY TO INACTIVE MEMBERS OF THE  
STONE TOWER SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST  
CHURCH, PORTLAND, OREGON

A Project Report  
Presented in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Doctor of Ministry

by  
John C. Alspaugh

April 1986

## CONTENTS

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS . . . . .	v
LIST OF TABLES . . . . .	v
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS . . . . .	vi
 I. INTRODUCTION . . . . .	 1
Statement of the Project . . . . .	3
Definition of Terms . . . . .	3
Objectives and Expectations . . . . .	5
Methodology for Qualitative, Descriptive Study . . . . .	7
Limitations of the Study . . . . .	12
 II. FOUNDATIONS . . . . .	 14
The Background of and Need for Ministry to Inactive Members . . . . .	 14
Losses from the Christian Church at Large . . . . .	14
Loss of Members from the Seventh-day Adventist Church . . . . .	 19
Membership Study of the Stone Tower SDA Church . . . . .	 21
Urgency for a Reclaiming Ministry . . . . .	31
Backsliding - The Member's Perspective . . . . .	34
Factors That Contribute to Backsliding . . . . .	34
The Adventist Dropout . . . . .	41
Resistance and Receptivity . . . . .	46
Backsliding - God's Perspective . . . . .	55
The Ideal and Reality . . . . .	55
Biblical Models . . . . .	57
Grace and the Dropout . . . . .	65
The Church and Backsliding . . . . .	68
How the Church Relates to Backsliders . . . . .	68
The Savage Model . . . . .	73
The Necessity for a Trained Laity . . . . .	81
A New Vision for Ministry to Inactive Members . . . . .	 85

III. IMPLEMENTATION . . . . .	87
Preparation . . . . .	87
Developing a Caring Attitude in the Church . . .	87
Identifying Inactive Members . . . . .	94
Selecting and Interviewing the Callers . . . . .	100
The Caring Ministry Seminar . . . . .	106
Basic Data of the Seminar . . . . .	106
Understanding the Dropout . . . . .	109
Demonstrating Caring Through Listening . . . . .	111
Learning and Practicing the Listening Skills . . .	116
Dealing with Emotions . . . . .	123
Helping the Dropout Return . . . . .	126
Visitation of Inactive Members . . . . .	129
Initiation of the Calling Program . . . . .	129
Support Groups . . . . .	132
Membership Reaffirmation Month . . . . .	135
Follow-up . . . . .	137
IV. EVALUATION . . . . .	140
Evaluation of the Caring Ministry . . . . .	140
Evaluation of the Training Seminar . . . . .	142
Response of the Inactive Members . . . . .	153
Learning and Growth of the Callers . . . . .	155
Personal Learning and Growth . . . . .	164
Improving the Effectiveness of the Caring Ministry Program in Seventh-day Adventist Churches . . .	169
The Future of the Caring Ministry Program in the Stone Tower Church . . . . .	177
APPENDIXES . . . . .	181
BIBLIOGRAPHY . . . . .	204



## LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

1. Stone Tower Membership, 1970 - 1983 . . . . .	24
2. Stone Tower Baptisms, 1970 - 1983 . . . . .	24
3. Stone Tower Membership Transfers, 1970 - 1983 . . . . .	25
4. Stone Tower Net Transfer Gain/Loss, 1970 - 1983 . . . . .	26
5. Area Surrounding Stone Tower Church Within a Radius of 3 1/2 to 4 Miles . . . . .	28
6. Stone Tower Members Dropped for Apostasy/Missing, 1970 - 1983 . . . . .	30

## LIST OF TABLES

1. Stone Tower Membership Data, 1970 - 1983 . . . . .	22
2. Stone Tower Membership According to Caring Ministry Categories, April 27, 1983 . . . . .	27
3. Stone Tower Members Attending Homecoming Worship Services . . . . .	154
4. Participants' Evaluation of Personal Growth . . . . .	158
5. Post-Seminar Attitudes Toward Visitation . . . . .	159

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It seems that dissertations and research papers are most often dedicated to wives--and for good reason. Wives provide encouragement and support; they serve as sounding boards and editors; they put up with their husband-writers during the long months of research and writing; and then they usually get left with the manuscript to type and polish.

My wife, Loretta, has served in all these capacities and more. She is co-leader in the Caring Ministry seminar; we plan and counsel together; and we visit inactive members together. Her advice and perspective have been invaluable in this project. And finally, her Wang word processor has made the writing and rewriting of this report a little less painful.

I would also like to express appreciation to Dr. Robert Gardner of Walla Walla College for his guidance in the development of this project, particularly his help with the chapters on methodology and evaluation.

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

At the close of the 1979 John Osborn Lectures hosted by Loma Linda University, an announcement was made that the following year's series would focus on ministry to inactive church members with Dr. John Savage as speaker. I remember wishing that we would not have to wait a year to hear such a vital subject. I was the pastor of the 400-member Bellflower-Lakewood Seventh-day Adventist Church in southern California. My impression was that one-fourth to one-third of our members were inactive, and I was very anxious to learn how to draw these members back into the life and mission of the church.

The 1980 John Osborn Lectures turned out to be a three-day workshop packed with the essential concepts and skills of Savage's "Calling and Caring Ministries." On the last day of the workshop, Savage announced that the full Lab I training program was being offered at the Fresno Central Church that weekend. As quickly as we could, my associate, Mark Papendick, and I made arrangements for others to cover our responsibilities so that we could attend this training event.

After completing the basic course, Mark and I began implementing what we had learned. We were thrilled with the new concepts and skills that enabled us to be more sensitive and therefore more helpful to both active and inactive members. However, as our visitation and counseling load increased, we saw the need to involve lay members in visitation and to share the caring concepts with the entire church. Approximately six months later we joined the Lab II training course, which prepared us to teach our members and involve them in this program.

Our wives, Loretta and Earlene, participated as students in the first seminar we conducted and soon added their abilities to this growing new ministry. When the opportunity came, they also took the Lab II training with Savage. By then we had over fifty trained callers and two trained pastoral couples. We were well on our way toward having a church trained in ministry to the unique needs of discouraged or inactive members.

In 1982 the Oregon Conference invited me to become pastor of Stone Tower Church in Portland, Oregon. The conference administration expressed the desire for us to establish a Caring Ministry and reach out to the many inactive and former members in the Portland area. Building on our previous experiences, we felt ready to accept this assignment. We also saw the situation of Stone Tower Church as an appropriate setting in which to carry out the research for this Doctor of Ministry project.

### Statement of the Project

It is the purpose of this project to establish a ministry to inactive members of the Stone Tower Seventh-day Adventist Church using callers who have been trained in the concepts, skills, and methods of the Caring Ministry, a model based on Savage's work and adapted for the unique needs of inactive Seventh-day Adventists.

This project is based on the premise that lay members of the church can be adequately trained for and supported in this personal, specialized visitation program, and that there are those who have dropped out of the church who will respond to this listening/caring ministry.

### Definition of Terms

There are a number of interchangeable terms used throughout this report, the most common being "inactive members." Savage calls these people "dropouts"; Detamore calls them "backsliders."<sup>1</sup> In other literature they may be referred to as "members in reversion," "marginally associated members," "lapsed," "delinquent," or "non-attending members."

The term "inactive member" refers to a person who currently holds membership in the church but whose lack of participation is based on "apathy" or "boredom," clinical terms John Savage uses to describe either a hopeless or helpless attitude toward involvement

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<sup>1</sup>Fordyce W. Detamore, Seeking His Lost Sheep (Nashville: Southern Pub. Assn., 1965), p. 9.

in the church.<sup>1</sup> The term "inactive" does not simply mean that a person is absent from the worship service, but rather that for a variety of reasons a person's faith system, support and fellowship resources, and involvement in the life and mission of the church are either temporarily or permanently interrupted.<sup>2</sup>

The term "dropout" could apply either to one who has actually dropped out of church membership or to one who has emotionally withdrawn from involvement. This does not necessarily imply that such a person has abandoned the faith, as is discussed later in this report.

The term "former member" is used in this report to describe someone who no longer belongs to the Seventh-day Adventist Church, that condition being at his or her own request or as initiated by the church.

Everett Perry et al.<sup>3</sup> have devised a profile of unchurched Protestants and have placed people in categories of the estranged,

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<sup>1</sup>"Helplessness is the effect felt when an individual perceives there is no help from outside of the self. . . . Helplessness precipitates apathy. It is giving up a relationship, either human or material. In short, it is the awareness there is nothing outside of the self that can provide help; therefore, one is helpless. The antithesis of helplessness is hopelessness. Hopelessness is the feeling there is no resource inside of the self to solve a problem. . . . The feeling of shame commonly precedes hopelessness in the response to some stress or anxiety." John S. Savage, The Apathetic and Bored Church Member: Psychological and Theological Implications (Pittsford, NY: LEAD Consultants, Inc., 1976), p. 6.

<sup>2</sup>See p. 94-99 of this report for a more complete discussion of "Identifying the Inactive Members."

<sup>3</sup>Everett Perry et al., "Toward a Typology of Unchurched Protestants," Review of Religious Research 21 (Supplement 1980): 388-404.

the indifferent, the nominals, and the nones. Russell Hale<sup>1</sup> has an even more refined system that includes twelve categories such as the "boxed in," the "burned out," the "drifters," the "happy hedonists," and the "nomads." These well-defined categories may be valuable to the study of the causes of apostasy but are of lesser interest to our study of the reclaiming ministry. No attempt has been made in this project to become highly technical with reference to the definition of inactivity; hence the more simplified and general use of terms in this report.

The term "Caring Ministry" is the title I have given to our local program of ministry to dropouts. It is to be distinguished from the "Caring Church" plan of reaching the community, winning converts, and nurturing and training believers as designed by the North American Division.

#### Objectives and Expectations

The proposal submitted and approved at the outset of this project stated five goals:

1. The ultimate goal of the project is to establish a listening/caring ministry to inactive members in the Stone Tower Seventh-day Adventist Church, in which inactive members may be able to resolve the disappointments in their church affiliation and/or respond positively to the invitation to reaffirm their commitment.
2. It is expected that the "Caring Ministry Seminar," based on the Lab I "Skills for Calling and Caring Ministries" by LEAD Consultants, will be an effective instrument for training lay persons in a visitation ministry to inactive church members.

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<sup>1</sup>Russell Hale, Who Are the Unchurched? An Exploratory Study (Washington, D.C.: Glenmary Research Center, 1977).

3. It is expected that the Stone Tower Church in general and the callers in particular will become more sensitive to the needs of less active and inactive members and will become more competent in meeting those needs.

4. The project will yield personal gain for this student by further developing his listening skills, by enhancing his ministry to the inactive church members, and by providing him the opportunity to organize and train lay persons in a support program.

5. The methods and suggestions growing out of this project may be helpful to other pastors and members of Seventh-day Adventist churches who wish to implement a visitation program directed toward inactive members or who have received training in the concepts and listening skills taught by Dr. John Savage and are planning to use them in their churches.

It is readily apparent that this is a major project with broad expectations. My project supervision committee repeatedly counseled me to keep the project focused and to use good methods in developing my evaluations and conclusions. Though torn by my desire to "be all things to all men," I have endeavored to follow their counsel.

At the outset, I anticipated that this study would come down to one basic question: Would the training program and visitation result in significant numbers of inactive members returning to the church? The emphasis on returning members seemed to be the only important goal, all else being only the means to achieve that goal. However, the longer I lived with the program, the more I realized the importance of the callers' experiences as well. Their preparation and training, their experiences in the homes of the inactive members, their ability to handle resistance and criticism, along with the suggestions and counsel they gave about the program, and the effect the training and visitation had in their own lives--these were vital to this study of the Caring Ministry.



This report, therefore, presents the theory and Biblical basis for ministry to inactive members. A description of the preparation and implementation of the Caring Ministry training seminar is presented, and the seminar and visitation program are evaluated in terms of the above-stated goals.

#### Methodology for Qualitative, Descriptive Study

The Church is a laboratory for the grandest of all sciences--the science of salvation. To be sure, it is different from the lab in which experiments are carried out in genetics, lasers, or microbiology. Yet the Church is a place where new programs are continually being launched, where the Scriptures are studied and applied, and where people are undergoing a wide range of religious experiences.

Little serious study, inquiry, and research is actually done in the local church. Programs, both new and old, are conducted year after year with little evaluation, reflection, or refinement. Follow-up is the Achilles heel of church programs. Because we fail to plan, execute, and evaluate, we do not learn; we do not grow as we could if we would give closer attention and systematic study to what is happening in the Church.

The evaluation we do give to church programs, the research we do conduct, is often clouded by the subjective nature of our judgment. We are selective in our observations, "evangelistic" in our counting. We need to know what we know, and how we know it.

The Doctor of Ministry program has given added emphasis to the need for ministers to give careful study to what happens in the church and to what they themselves are accomplishing. In the Doctor of Ministry program the field study encourages you to bring theory and practice together. If that is accomplished,

the motivation for research has become a part of your self-concept as a professional person. The doing of theology, the practice of ministry, will include periodic examination of your assumptions, the production of evidence as you are accomplishing what you set out to do. The field requirement provides new adequacy for your continuing education, not only because of the techniques you learn, but also because of the motivation that is provided for continual reassessment.<sup>1</sup>

In order to give validity and reliability to our studies, scientific methodology has often been applied to religious research. This method has proven valuable, especially when the research is trying to establish something that can be quantified. The use of computers, control groups, and questionnaires has helped religious researchers avoid biases and wishful thinking and thus has made the research more credible.

However, there are so many things about church life that cannot be put into computers. One cannot adequately measure morale, evangelistic zeal, or spirituality. Church members or volunteers may resist, if not resent, being studied for research. And besides all this, the average pastor who is at home in the pulpit or at someone's kitchen table with an open Bible feels very much out of place in the world of statistics and hypothesis testing. He is generally not prepared to use sophisticated research techniques because the seminary program usually does not include such training. Statistical studies which report " $H_0: \emptyset = 0$  in favor of  $H_A: \emptyset \neq 0 \geq .20$ " are not very relevant to a practical, people-oriented ministry.

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<sup>1</sup>Samuel Southard, Religious Inquiry: An Introduction to the Why and How (Nashville: Abingdon, 1976), pp. 52, 53.

This very dilemma stymied my efforts in setting up the evaluation procedures for this project. For a long time I was bogged down by the seemingly hopeless task of applying multi-variate, nonparametric statistics to my project. I had learned, with the Lord's blessing and many experiences, how to visit in the homes of inactive members and listen with sensitivity and caring. But I did not know how to submit this process to statistical research.

Then Dr. Robert Gardner, director of institutional research at Walla Walla College, introduced me to "descriptive" or "qualitative" research. Qualitative methodology is accepted in sociology, anthropology, and psychology and is well suited to many situations of religious research.

Qualitative methodology is first-hand involvement that comes from participation in that which is being studied. It aims not so much at predicting social phenomena but at understanding the phenomena. Its tools include open-ended interviewing, personal observations, descriptions of events and interactions, quotations from people about their experiences, attitudes, beliefs, and thoughts. In some instances case studies are used for in-depth presentation of people or life histories. Informants are often used to help the researcher get closer to the phenomena he or she is studying.

Through all these methods, the researcher becomes immersed in that which is being studied. Yet there must remain what Glasser

and Strauss call the "informed detachment."<sup>1</sup> This detachment requires that the researcher not manipulate the research setting but that he allow the data collected through "naturalistic inquiry" to jell into general hypotheses and eventually into substantive theory and conviction.

William J. Filstead argues that qualitative methodology is indeed research that is worthy of the name.

Qualitative methodology allows the researcher to "get close to the data," thereby developing the analytical, conceptual, and categorical components of explanation from the data itself-- rather than from preconceived, rigidly structured, and highly quantified techniques that pigeonhole the empirical social world into the operational definitions that the researcher has constructed.<sup>2</sup>

In the final analysis, the conclusions of descriptive study are those of the observer. It may be argued that they are subject to bias and are therefore unreliable. Glasser and Strauss give strong counter to this assertion:

If there is only one fieldworker involved, it is he himself who knows what he knows about what he has studied and lived through. They are his perceptions, his personal experiences, and his own hard-won analyses. The fieldworker knows that he knows, not only because he's been there in the field and because of his careful verification of hypotheses, but because 'in his bones' he feels the worth of his final analysis. He has been living with partial analyses for many months, testing them each step of the way, until he has built his final substantive theory. What is more, if he has participated in the social life of his subjects then he has been living by his analyses, testing them out not only by observation and

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<sup>1</sup>Barney G. Glasser and Anselm L. Strauss, "Discovery of Substantive Theory: A Basic Strategy Underlying Qualitative Research," in Qualitative Methodology: Firsthand Involvement with the Social World, ed. William J. Filstead (Chicago: Markham Publ. Co., 1970), p. 295.

<sup>2</sup>William J. Filstead, Introduction to Qualitative Methodology, p. 6.

interview but also in daily livable fact. Hence by the close of his investigation, his conviction about his theory would be hard to shake. . . . This conviction does not mean that his analysis is the only plausible one that might be based on this data, but only that the researcher has high confidence in its credibility.<sup>1</sup>

Quantitative and qualitative methodologies do not need to sit in opposition to each other. In fact, they are often complementary.

Neither of these paradigms is intrinsically better than the other for institutional research. Instead, they represent alternatives between which researchers can choose. Moreover, there are a number of ways in which both qualitative and quantitative approaches can be combined or used simultaneously.<sup>2</sup>

The evaluation chapter in this report was written following primarily the methodology of qualitative study. My goal, however, was not to demonstrate my ability to write pure descriptive research but to present the Caring Ministry program in such a way that the reader would understand both the substance and dynamics of the project. Therefore I have been somewhat eclectic and included tables, figures, and simple numerical information when they best demonstrate the quantitative data from the program. The evaluation is primarily descriptive--bringing together observations, reactions, comments, perceptions, and personal convictions in an effort to depict the real issues and dynamics of the Caring Ministry. As student-researcher, program leader, caller and pastor, I have endeavored to integrate the data of observation, interview, and

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<sup>1</sup>Glasser and Strauss, p. 295.

<sup>2</sup>Michael Quinn Patton, "Qualitative Methods and Approaches: What Are They?" in Qualitative Methods for Institutional Research, ed. Eileen Khuns and S. V. Martorana (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Inc., Publishers, 1982), p. 5.

personal conviction with a conscious attempt to be both involved participant and detached observer.

#### Limitations of the Study

The study of the Caring Ministry is limited to the experiences of Stone Tower members who participated in training and visitation, to the reports and evaluations the callers have rendered, and to the observations and convictions of the program leaders.

No attempt was made to set up control groups to measure attitude and skill differences between those who took the training and those who did not, nor to measure the response of the inactive members who received Caring Ministry visits as compared to those who did not. In a few places, simple statistics have been incorporated, but they have not been subjected to statistical analysis for the purpose of predicting standardized results. This is a descriptive study of the experiences of those who participated in the program and an evaluation of the data collected thereby.

Even after this project is complete, many questions will remain unanswered--potential fodder for future studies: What other methods could be employed for ministry to inactive members, and which would be the most successful? How could the concept of "spiritual gifts" make the selection and use of Caring Ministry callers more effective? What is the statistical probability of inactive Seventh-day Adventists returning when ministered to through the program advocated in this report? What is the correlation factor for the many variables of age, circumstances of

dropping out, and time inactive away from the church? These questions are beyond the scope of this project and therefore remain unanswered.

It should also be pointed out that, though this report gives suggestions for adapting John Savage's "Skills for Calling and Caring Ministries" to the Seventh-day Adventist Church, this is not an attempt to rewrite his program.

## CHAPTER II

### FOUNDATIONS

#### The Background of and Need for Ministry to Inactive Members

##### Losses from the Christian Church at Large

At first glance the New Testament does not seem to be very concerned about dropouts. Its pages are filled with the truths of Christianity, conquests of the early Church, and portrayals of apocalyptic events. Yet a closer look reveals that from the very beginning, dropping out has been a problem in the Christian church and that the Scriptures do have much to say to this need.

Even while anticipating the agony of His own death, Jesus' concern reached out to Judas, His lost disciple, and to others who might fall away because of the scandal and disillusion surrounding His crucifixion. Jesus prayed, "While I was with them, I protected them and kept them safe by that name you gave me. None has been lost except the one doomed to destruction . . . ." <sup>1</sup> No doubt Jesus felt a great sense of loss when the crowds turned away because of His "hard saying."<sup>2</sup> Yet these were only the fore-runners of tens of thousands who likewise would set their feet on

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<sup>1</sup>John 17:12 (NIV).

<sup>2</sup>John 6:60-66.



the Christian pathway, later to give up because of persecution, apostasy, boredom, or discouragement.

The New Testament contains many direct references to apostasy and dropping out of the church. "Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world," Paul wrote to Timothy.<sup>1</sup> The Epistle to the Hebrews was written to strengthen those who had become discouraged and seemed ready to return to their former way of life:

Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God. But exhort one another daily, while it is called Today; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end.<sup>2</sup>

Looking into the future with prophetic insight, the Apostle Paul declared:

I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them.<sup>3</sup>

Time proved the apostle to be right as the Christian church suffered great losses through the years. In the chapter "The Apostasy" in The Great Controversy, Ellen G. White identified many of the causes of this loss: heathen practices entering the church, persecution, human theories and traditions, compromise, and unconsecrated church leaders.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>2 Tim 4:10.

<sup>2</sup>Heb 3:12-14. See also Heb 10:22-26, 35-38; 12:1, 2.

<sup>3</sup>Acts 20:29, 30.

<sup>4</sup>Ellen G. White, The Great Controversy Between Christ and Satan (Mountain View, Calif: Pacific Press, 1911), pp. 49-60.

In recent years, however, a new phenomenon has occurred. Nowadays we hear few of the fiery attacks on the church from antagonists or atheists such as characterized the past. The new phenomenon has been described by Robert Barrat as a "silent hemorrhage."

They leave the Church on tiptoe, without saying anything, for a thousand and one reasons, of which the principal one is their impression that the Church does not understand their needs, their aspirations--that the religion and teaching they receive is incapable of entering into their life and giving it sufficient nourishment, and that their problems of family, professional, social and political life are not understood.<sup>1</sup>

An even more specific phenomenon that is the direct concern of this paper has to do with the large number of people who remain church members in body, but who have left it in spirit: the inactive members who attend little if at all, who may believe in their hearts, but whose outward life does not show a vibrant Christianity or a close relationship to the church.

This problem, then, has two faces. One face looks outward from the church into the world to which the members have gone. The other face looks inward to the bored, burned out, discouraged, disgruntled, inactive members.

How large is this problem? How widespread is it among the Christian churches?

Southern Baptists are alarmed by the size of the problem they face.

More than one fourth of our members are nonresidents, which means that over 3 million Baptists don't live within reach of the

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<sup>1</sup>Robert Barrat, "Schism in France?" Commonweal 82 (September 17, 1965):652.

churches where they have their membership. Another one fourth of our members are inactive residents. They live within reach of the churches where they belong, but they have no vital relationship with them.<sup>1</sup>

Other Baptist studies confirm that at least 25 to 30 percent of the local resident members are inactive.<sup>2</sup> Baptist author Gaines S. Dobbins has written,

One of the greatest problems of Southern Baptists today is the large number of inactive church members on our church rolls. Many churches have simply accepted the fact that at least 25 percent of their members are going to be inactive, nonresident or otherwise not accounted for.<sup>3</sup>

John Savage's study of four Methodist congregations showed a 33 percent inactive membership.<sup>4</sup> Since few churches keep or publish records of inactive members, the full extent of this problem is unknown. Many of the mainline Protestant churches have suffered significant losses of membership during the last

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<sup>1</sup>Delos Miles, "Solving the Inactive Resident Church Member Problem," Church Administration, October 1972, pp. 24-26. Note: The author goes on in this article to say that some of these inactive members include shut-ins, people who work on Sunday, young families with infants, older people who cannot come to church, spouses of non-members. According to the classification system later introduced in this paper, not all of these members would be considered inactive.

<sup>2</sup>Jimmy P. Crowe, "Covenant Fellowship Emphasis Interpretation Clinic," Church Training, November 1976, pp. 32-34; "New Emphasis Focuses on Inactive Church Members," Facts and Trends 21 (January 1977):1; Charles A. Ballew, "Developing a Ministry of Reclamation in the Oakland Baptist Church, Birmingham, Alabama," (D.Min. project report, New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, 1979) p. 63.

<sup>3</sup>Gaines S. Dobbins, "The Deacons' Ministry to Church Dropouts," The Deacon 1 (Jan-Mar 1971):23.

<sup>4</sup>Savage, The Apathetic and Bored Church Member, p. 76.

ten years,<sup>1</sup> and this leads us to speculate that they must also have an inactive membership as great as or greater than the figures cited. Richard Vangerid summarized: "It seems more likely that differences from congregation to congregation and denomination to denomination would be ones of degree rather than kind."<sup>2</sup>

One would expect that this problem of inactive members, affecting one-fourth to one-third of the membership of most churches, would have received a great deal of attention and research and that methods would have been studied and tested to reclaim those who became discouraged in their spiritual experience. Jerry Lee, who studied former Adventists in California, stated, "Little was found in the way of behavioral research on apostasy prior to 1975. This seems to be a poorly researched area."<sup>3</sup> Louis Nielsen studied backsliding among Michigan Adventists and made the same observation. ". . . practically no studies have been made of religious defection or disassociation from the church."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>See Dean M. Kelley, Why Conservative Churches Are Growing: A Study in Sociology of Religion (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1977), pp. 1-10.

<sup>2</sup>Richard D. Vangerid, "A Study of Certain Inactive Members in a Local Congregation," Journal of Pastoral Care 12 (Spring 1968):8.

<sup>3</sup>Jerry W. Lee, "Seeking the Lost Sheep: A Study of Membership Loss in the Southeastern California Conference of Seventh-day Adventists," Southeastern California Conference, August 1980, p. 3.

<sup>4</sup>Louis C. Nielsen, "Disassociation: An Investigation into the Contributing Factors of Backsliding and Separation from the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Michigan" (D.Min. project report, Andrews University, 1977), p. 31.

In recent years much has been written about the causes of backsliding. Yet to this date only a handful of studies exist which document a church's efforts to reclaim former members or rekindle the fire within the lives in inactive members. The possibilities within this field for real church growth seem ripe for development.

#### Loss of Members from the Seventh-day Adventist Church

The Seventh-day Adventist Church has a dropout problem, but the problem is not new. Elder Theodore Carcich documented 16,879 apostasies in the years 1943 to 1946.<sup>1</sup> Elder Robert Whitsett appealed for a loving interest and warm invitation to be extended to the 94,848 members dropped from 1936 to 1952.<sup>2</sup> The General Conference Office of Archives and Statistics gives the total apostasies and missing in the North American Division from January 1, 1918, through December 31, 1983, as 495,342.<sup>3</sup>

From these figures Elder Don Yost has projected what the SDA world membership would be if we had not lost these members through apostasy.

If membership losses had been reduced by 25 percent, 1980 world membership would have been 4,200,961. If reduced by 50 percent:

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<sup>1</sup>Theodore Carcich, "How Can We Check Our Apostasies?" Ministry, August 1947, p. 27.

<sup>2</sup>Robert M. Whitsett, "Missing - 90,000!" Ministry, September 1953, p. 11.

<sup>3</sup>Audrey McClintic, General Church Statistics Specialist, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, for Elder Yost to writer, 12 January 1984.

5,047,641; if reduced by 75 percent: 6,075,174; if reduced by 100 percent: 7,283,280!<sup>1</sup>

Statistics over the last thirty years show that in North America, for every 100 new members who come into the church through baptism or profession of faith, 36 to 41 members leave through apostasy or become missing.<sup>2</sup> The 1983 loss/gain ratio was 38.1 percent.<sup>3</sup> The first quarter of 1984 the loss/gain ratio was an astonishing 65.31 percent!<sup>4</sup>

A study of growth patterns in the Oregon Conference also shows a high loss/gain ratio. Comparing the gains through baptism and profession of faith to the losses by apostasy and missing for the years 1977 to 1983, there was a loss/gain ratio of 45.98 percent.<sup>5</sup> This loss led Andrews University researchers to state that "controlling apostasy appears to be the most important single factor in promoting church growth in Oregon."<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Don [Donald F.] Yost, quoted in "Shop Talk: One Thousand Days of Reaping," Ministry, October 1982, p. 32.

<sup>2</sup>Lee, p. 2; Daniel E. Caslow, Discipling: New Member Ministry (Mountain View, Calif: Pacific Press, 1982), p. 52; N. F. Brewer, "Conserving Our Membership," Ministry, December 1955, p. 9.

<sup>3</sup>"North American Division Summary of Progress," 1983 Fourth Quarter Report, issued by the Director of Archives and Statistics, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists (Washington, D.C.).

<sup>4</sup>"North American Division Summary of Progress," 1984 First Quarter Report, issued by the Director of Archives and Statistics, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists (Washington, D.C.).

<sup>5</sup>Statistics supplied by Elder John Todorovich, Oregon Conference Secretary.

<sup>6</sup>Roger L. Dudley; Des Cummings, Jr.; Don Ritterskamp; "A Study of Factors Relating to Church Growth in the Oregon Conference of Seventh-day Adventists" (Andrews University for the Oregon Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, August 1982), p. 38.

It should be pointed out that the statistics cited refer only to members who were actually dropped from the church records. These figures do not indicate the number who remain members but are inactive in the life and mission of the church. By extrapolation we would presume that this indicates a high percentage of inactive members who may later be dropped at their own request or by church action.

Preventing apostasies and reclaiming inactives should be two priority items on the agenda of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

#### Membership Study of the Stone Tower SDA Church

The Stone Tower congregation has been in existence more than 100 years. It began as the East Portland Sabbath School on March 17, 1881. When the congregation built their own church facility, they named it "Central Seventh-day Adventist Church." "Old Central" was called the "Mother Church" of Portland because practically every congregation in the city was started by a nucleus from its membership. Eventually the old church became too small, and in 1953 the Stone Tower Church was erected.

Stone Tower was built as an evangelistic center, anticipating that it would provide a central location from which to evangelize the city of Portland. A paragraph taken from the "History of Stone Tower Church" records this tribute to the members and leaders of the church:

Down through the years Stone Tower (Old Central) has been a mighty power in the cause of God. She is the mother church of Portland. Hundreds have been baptized into Christ and her fellowship. Thousands have been touched by her ministry. Millions of dollars have been poured into the cause of God by

her membership. Stone Tower is a church with a great history. The Spirit of God has burned in her pulpit; strong leaders have borne her standard; consecrated, Godly Christians have comprised her membership. She has done a mighty work for eternity!<sup>1</sup>

There are many factors that must be taken into consideration when analyzing membership patterns for any given church. Table 1 gives some of the factors that are easy to measure--baptisms, deaths, numbers lost through apostasy and becoming missing, transfer gain/loss totals, and the year-end membership for Stone Tower Church.

TABLE 1  
STONE TOWER MEMBERSHIP DATA, 1970 - 1983

Baptisms	40	57	38	11	23	68	75	17	19	17	13	11	18	12
Deaths	8	12	12	10	10	16	7	9	7	7	7	13	11	13
Apostasy & Missing	0	18	0	4	39	1	0	26	14	49	73	91	1	1
Transfer Gain-Loss	-6	-21	-17	+10	-15	+41	+5	-78	+1	-24	+15	-50	-36	-5
Year End Membership	798	804	813	820	779	871	944	848	847	784	732	589	559	552
	1970	1971	1972	1973	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983

The life and growth experience of a church is not found in just a few pieces of data but is a complex accumulation of many factors, some of which are intangible but nonetheless very real.

Some of those factors would include the following:

The varying emphases and styles of leadership of the pastors

The strength and involvement of the lay leadership

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<sup>1</sup>"Stone Tower Seventh-day Adventist Church Directory," 1984.



The structure and facilities of the church building  
 The sense of mission and evangelistic program of the church  
 The assimilation and nurture of new members  
 The atmosphere of caring, love and fellowship among the congregation

Population shifts also affect the makeup of a church family. At one time Stone Tower Church was in the center of the city with a flourishing Adventist community. In recent years, however, younger families have moved to the suburbs. The Adventist institutions (North Pacific Union Conference office, Oregon Conference office, Portland Adventist Medical Center, Portland Adventist Academy, and Portland Adventist Elementary School), which were at one time within very close proximity to Stone Tower Church, have all moved to new facilities miles away from the church. These two factors alone have had a significant negative effect on the leadership, membership transfers, and morale of the Stone Tower Church.

Figure 1 shows in a graphic way the net effect on membership of many factors operating in the history of Stone Tower Church. The time period of 1970 to 1974 shows a stable church, but one with little growth. The years of 1974 to 1976 reflect a strong evangelistic emphasis with significant growth. The years since 1976 have been a period of decline.

A church in decline experiences difficulties. Pastors and members alike prefer to be in a church that is growing, or at least holding its own. Figure 2 shows baptisms over the past fourteen years. It makes us wonder: Has the church membership declined since 1976 because the baptisms were low? Or have the baptisms

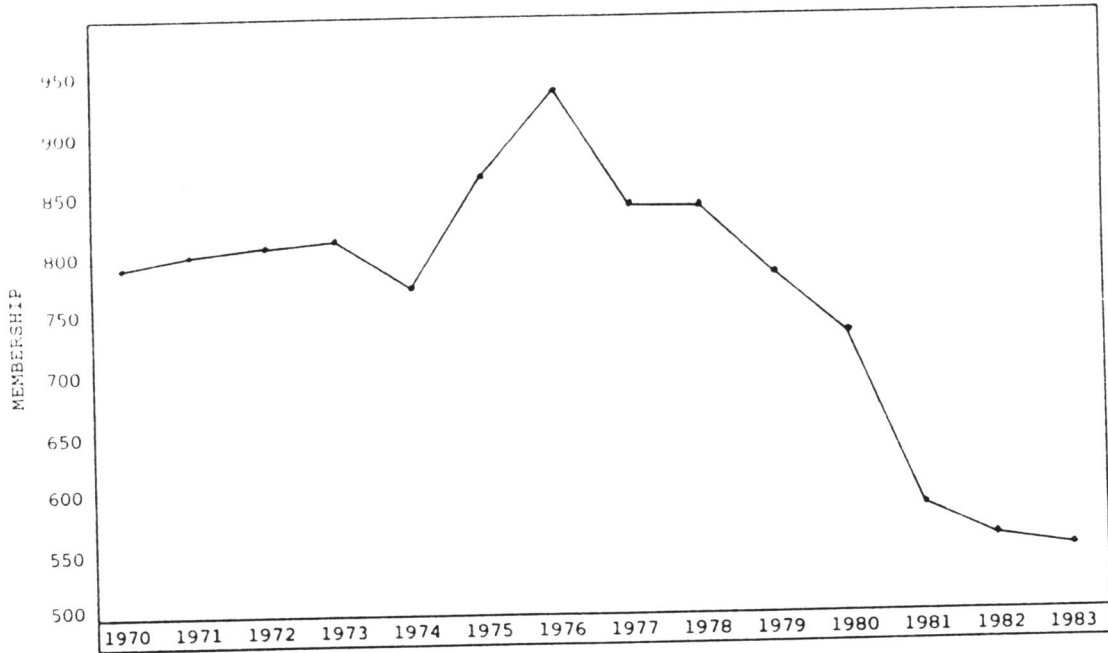


Fig. 1 Stone Tower membership, 1970 - 1983



Fig. 2 Stone Tower baptisms, 1970 - 1983

been low because the spirit and morale of the church were in decline?

When we view the growth patterns of a church from the systems perspective, we realize that no factor operates in isolation. Morale is something that everyone senses, but it is very difficult to measure. Perhaps one indicator of morale, especially in a multi-church metropolitan area such as Portland, is the transfer gain or loss. Figure 3 shows the total transfers from 1970 through 1983.

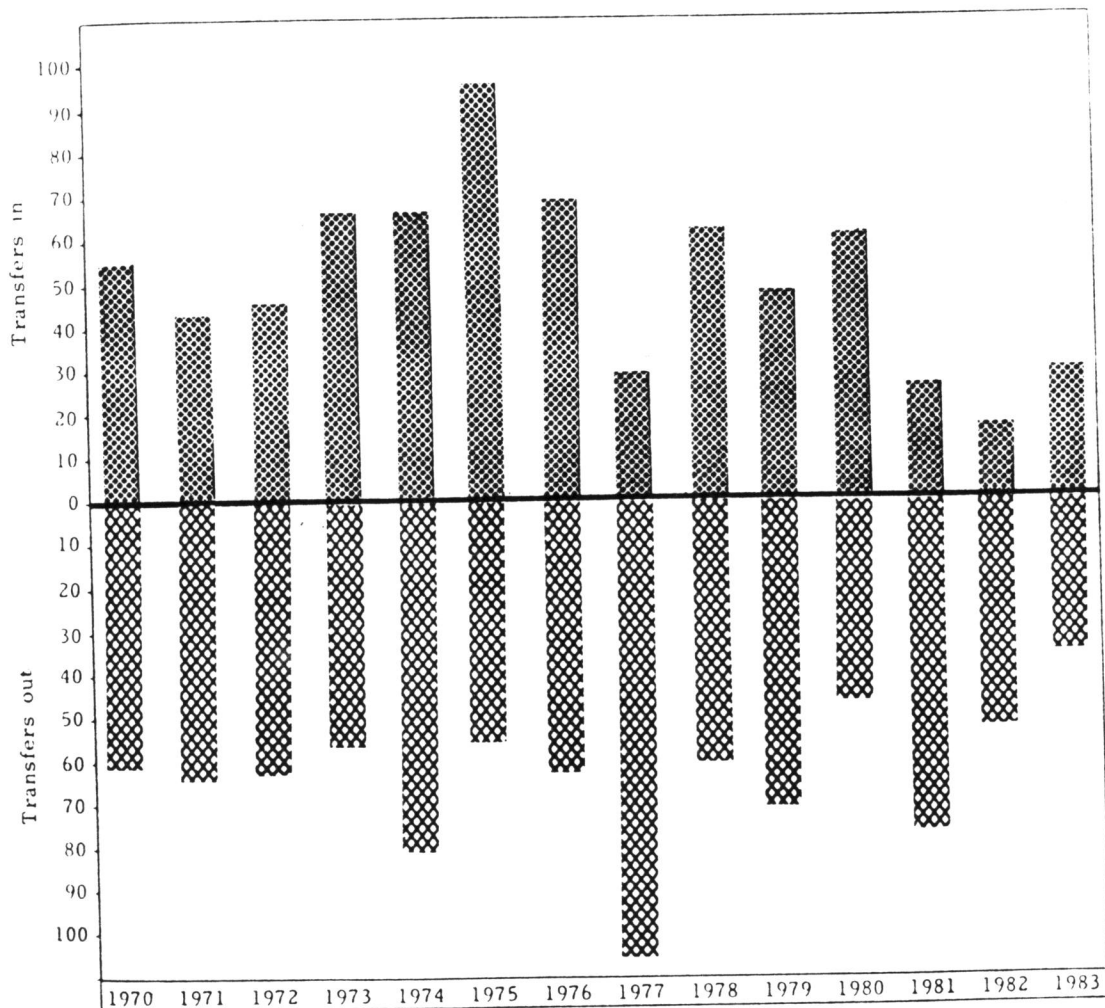


Fig. 3 Stone Tower membership transfers, 1970 - 1983