

Should We Pursue Those Who Leave The Church?

Thanks for your responses! So many were submitted, we were unable to list them all in Contact. The entire article for each submission may be found below. Click on the names that follow to jump to their letter.

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James C. Parker

This is a wonderful question in my opinion and one worthy of 21st century thought. The idea of pursuing membership is nothing new to the church community. It is a concept as old as the story of Moses and the Exodus. Consequently, for millenniums humankind has attempted to propagate or extend its idea of spiritual/religious possession onto its membership. As a Unity Minister, the idea of confining people seeking Universal idealisms to only one “school of thought” seems ambiguous. First, we sit in a new era where information is at our fingertips. Secondly, our ability to reach present and new members has extended globally through today’s technological advances. Our churches can streamline broadcast our services, introduce online courses, allow for networking opportunities in the church, publish online meditations & prayers, collect offerings and tithes through e-commerce, institute podcasts, and genuinely meet our members on all levels.

As it pertains to Unity and its Principles, the basis of this argument is incongruous. Particularly, since Unity’s Principles places no belief above the Omnipresence, Omnipotence, and Omniscience of God. Therefore, to find ourselves debating attrition associated with our organization and its beliefs is beyond reproach yet necessary. It is a foregone conclusion in the 21st Century that people no longer stay committed to things for 25-30 years. Simply taking a look at the American employment market

suggests people are merely seeking to make a short-term contribution as they seek the next great thing. Yes, we can look at this subjectively and find fault in it, because it presupposes non-commitment. Yet, if we look at it objectively we can assert it as advantageous for the movement, church, or community who can institute programs which strengthen the short-term member while increasing congregant size through extension programs, education, development, networking, etc. If we are to grow as an organization we must become willing to see the Good in attrition and act accordingly.

In conclusion, no we should not pursue those who leave. People move on...this is a fact of life. Through boredom, resignation, retirement, and death or transformation...they go. What happened to the phrase, "If you love someone you should let them go and if they return it was meant to be?" Isn't this the Unity way? Are we not an organization built on freedom, movement, and allowance? We teach Love as a Universal Principle based in freedom, honor, respect, unity, giving and forgiving. We are an organization of acceptance where we do not turn away people for any reason including there wanting to leave...it is ours to hold the high watch and honor the decisions of others.

Shirley L. Geer

It is my belief that ministers, boards and/or congregations should pursue those who leave the church. All thru my various job positions [Sales Person, Executive Secretary, Program Manager, Social Worker], I was trained by business experts to recognize my customers & to meet their needs as best I could. Businesses, which are out to make a profit, must meet needs of customers or they won't be in business long. Their customers are out-of-house as well as in-house; they're the clients, buyers, shoppers, co-workers, bosses, secretaries down the hall, suppliers, delivery persons, etc.

One of the best things a business can do is to gently pursue clients or workers who leave the business. In business magazines, experts promote the idea that the best employers conduct exit interviews. They ask all employees, as they leave the company, for all kinds of feedback: how the company is doing, how the relationships are, how the work load is, what works, what doesn't, etc. They also ask clients how the company's services might be improved, what is working well, what is not working, etc. That way, problems in the production line or in the front office can be spotted & corrected before other employees & clients are 'lost' to rivals or other fields.

Companies spend a lot of time & resources to train employees; sharp employers recognize that investment as worth preserving. A key thing in the business field is: stay ahead of the game, keep up with the latest technology or business practices, keep up with your particular field. The companies, which respond fastest to a new trend, tend to make the most gains in all areas of business.

Although churches are not classified as businesses, we're still in the business of meeting the needs of our customers. Those are: church members, board members, team leaders, children in the church's educational programs, volunteers, visitors, the community, etc. If we cannot meet their needs for spiritual growth, new ideas, socializing, emotional &/or prayer support, shared intimacy & group fellowship, safety in the church, & opportunities for service to others, we might as well close our doors now.

When people leave the church, knowing why they left could enhance the whole group. Perhaps it was non-problematic: because they moved away, married & joined the spouse's church; or truly problematic: because they got fed up with someone in the church, have a conflict with the board or minister, can't afford the gas to get to church, feel unsafe there, are not being spiritually fed. Maybe they decided to 'search within for their highest authority,' while at the beach or summer cabin & will be back in the fall.

If problematic situations can be identified quickly, solutions can be more quickly found, so others don't experience the same thing. Problematic situations, which are not

identified, cannot be changed. There are 3 steps to changing anything. (1) Become aware of what you are doing that is not working; (2) own that fact; (3) try something new & see if it works better. This whole question involves the very first step of change.

John Considine

I think it's wise to send one letter to the entire congregation upon the new minister's arrival offering apologies for anything untoward that happened in the past and inviting those who left back. Beyond that, nope. My experience is that anything beyond that focuses the church's attention on "there's something wrong here" and that brews troubles. It's a good thing that people leave. They need to leave... for themselves and often for the church. If the church focuses its energies upon building a more loving and inspiring ministry, some of them will be back. The others are blessed to move on.

Coco Ramos

People leave churches for many reasons, and the decision to pursue them or not should be based on spiritual discernment and prayer.

In the past I spent agonizing hours trying to find reasons why someone has stopped attending. As ministers we can waste a lot of time and energy speculating about the reasons leading to someone leaving the church. This is not a good thing because generally speculation is based on assumptions.

On one occasion, when a congregant distanced herself from the church I made assumptions that were wrong. When I finally decided to pursue the matter, I was pleasantly surprised to find out that it was a simple misunderstanding that was very easy to solve. In another circumstance, the meeting with the person, revealed expectations that the church could not match without compromising its core values and mission, which of course led to a pleasant and cordial parting of the ways.

I suggest that we begin by analyzing the objective data. Usually that boils down to, who left, and how long they had been in attendance, what was their involvement and support level, and when was the last time they attended the church. Be alert to judgments and projections disguising themselves as data. Avoid asking the "why" type of question because that will only lead to judgment and speculation. If people have stopped attending after an obviously evident situation, conflict or incident, then analyze the objective data of that incident.

Once you have objectively analyzed the data, take it into prayer knowing that you will be guided to do the right thing.

It is important to keep in mind that churches are organic and dynamic and that building relationships is important. While we cannot be all things to all people, we must be alert to whether we are meeting our congregant's individual spiritual needs. A system must be in place to alert us when a regular attendee suddenly misses church two or three Sundays in a row. A phone call to let the person know that he or she was missed and to voice concern for their wellbeing, can strengthen a relationship and sometimes reveal individual needs of which we have not been aware.

In closing, every situation is and will be different. There is no cookie-cutter approach to this. Deep reflection and prayer will lead you to right action. In Philippians 4:8 Paul writes: Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. And that is a good idea!

Sandra Weisner

I have tried contacting those who have left the church and have found it to be difficult and frustrating. When people just leave without notice, in my experience, they are generally not forthcoming about their reasons for leaving. If I was able to speak with them, I did not have a good conversion rate for getting them back to church. I was often met with excuses and defensiveness. I don't recommend it. As Jack Boland used to say, "let them go and tithe them back to the community."

John Butler

I start from the vantage point of being 100 % responsible for the results I create. When I notice that someone leaves my congregation I see it as my obligation and spiritual opportunity to seek to understand why. That does not mean that I am able to resolve it, but at the very least I seek to understand.

In the meantime, I can tell you that over the past 6 years many more people have left this ministry than currently attend. If I take this as an indictment of my skills as a minister, then this is debilitating news. In wanting to understand retention in ministry, I found that even in successful churches something like 90 % of the people who attend for three consecutive months will probably leave within the first year. Moreover, nine out of ten first-time guests will be unlikely to return for a second visit.

Moving past these general statistics, there is still a deep feeling of abandonment and loss when a key member of a congregation leaves. Our congregation created shared membership agreements that invite closure and completion when someone is leaving the church. Those who follow these agreements tend to leave on good terms and usually for benign reasons. In the environment created with shared membership agreements, some leave with hard feelings and they tend to blast me as the reason rather than follow the completion and closure that our community seeks. In these cases, it becomes pretty apparent that the Unity teachings have not registered deeply enough to overcome their triggered reaction that says "I am right and you are wrong- and I am leaving".

I have concluded three things: First, former congregants do not often really know why they are leaving and find it easier to blame someone else for their experience. I accept this and do not take it personally. Second, we have an energy field, a "charism" that works best when we are aligned with who we are called to be. Some folks just do not fit our charism. As an example, we are a hugging church and some people are uncomfortable in this environment. We have tried and tried to manage this and finally decided to accept that we have a charism that is uncomfortable for some of our more reserved guests. We simply are not the right environment to be their spiritual home and so release them with love and no misgivings.

Third, there are a lot of times when my intentions as Minister are good and yet my actions are not effective. I make mistakes; sometimes acting without thinking things through, misspeaking on occasion and so forth. In these cases, I am willing to reach out to those who have left and make an unqualified amends. I am not trying to hook them back into Unity or this ministry- I am blessing them with my ownership of my shortcomings and releasing them from our congregation with love. As it turns out, a few of them do return, usually after seeing their reactions to my mistakes in a different light and perhaps seeing their own part of the issue more clearly. Our conversation has opened up their hearts again and they more than ever appreciate the healing and transformative environment we co-create.

Ed Kosak

I do feel as though some outreach needs to be done. I don't push it though. I have had a few people not write or call back and I've just let them be.

Diane Stark

Speaking as an old timer who was in a Unity congregation when they were still called "Unity Centers," at that time, it was strictly taboo. The Unity work was not as community oriented as it is now. People came by their own choice. Unity study was considered to be something that was never sold or even promoted.

That whole orientation style has changed. I know a man who had attended a Unity church for over ten years. One day, he was rushed to the hospital and in long-term care for over ten months. He was very disappointed that he wasn't missed. He felt hurt that no one reached out to him in all that time.

One could say that he could have called the church himself. He was elderly with vision and hearing impairment, and perhaps had no easy access to a phone. He had no family still living to intercede.

A story like this indicates that there is a need to maintain community bonds and support in the infrastructure of a Unity church. It can be done in a variety of ways, by a variety of different people in different roles. But, it does need to be handled, with a protocol and a mechanism to identify who is missing.

Joseph Byrne

If a person leaves our church due to stress or disagreement we are not doing our job if we do not continue to love and support them. Of course there are other reasons people leave, like they are drawn to another church because the other church better meets their needs, or they are attracted to another path, but if they leave because of conflict we owe it to them to love them and support them in recovering from their disappointment, even if they do not return. And to do this requires pursuing them. Jesus said if you have 100 sheep and one goes astray then go after the one. That is pursuit.

It takes a person committed to practicing oneness and committed to agreeing and disagreeing in love to pursue one who is angry at us. It is emotionally easier to be rid of them, but that is the way of the unenlightened. We are called to unity, not disunity, and to be that requires courage and determination. Jesus went and found his scattered followers after the resurrection and which of us was denied by his followers like Jesus was? If we walk in our own resurrection we will find a love for those who leave us that will be the energy and motivation that causes us to seek them out.

Jesus taught if your brother is in disagreement with you then leave your gift at the altar and go reconcile with your brother. That means leave the comfort of the church and go out and find them.

Harry Kudiabor

My strong opinion is that ministers, board, congregants should not necessarily chase those people who left the church.

It is however prudent to have a board meeting in order to share opinions about those who left the church. There may be good reasons why individuals left the church. Reasons like misunderstandings unknown to the Minister or gossiping about individuals, also unknown to the minister or the Board. Or, individuals may be sick or bereaved. There are so many factors which need investigation by the Board.

There is a new wind blowing which our Unity Ministries should reconsider whether our Unity philosophy, like the individual Christ within, is enough without an outside human love and feelings for one another. I truly don't have an answer.

It appears to me that the current ministries, including our Unity Ministries, are teaching the Unity message. Could it be that the New Thought/Unity Teachings throughout the years have now covered the Earth like the oceans? Our success of the Unity movement appears to transcend our individual Unity Ministries which is spreading and spilling off over the Earth. I still don't have an answer again on this topic.

I am however confident of one thing: The Universal Mind apparently has got a Plan beyond Human thinking. Could it be that the Human Race is now being exposed to the Oneness of the Universality of the entire Human Family?

I am happy that our Unity Teachings, founded long ago by Charles and Myrtle Fillmore, which has been based on the Teaching of Jesus Christ, have been able to stand the test of time until now.

In conclusion, one could say that individual is truly free to float on the wind of Spirit which dwells in each and everyone until one's oneness is finally established. Having said all of this, we must remember we are still here in the flesh to love, to care, to support each other with prayer and if possible with material substance.

Alicia Leslie

One of the greatest challenges I have experienced in ministry is losing congregation members. First of all, I truly believe that Unity has a life-changing, world healing teaching...a philosophy and theology...that can bless every life. Second, I fall in love with each person who walks through the door. And when someone comes and goes, or comes and stays a while or longer and goes, it hurts. My ego cries out in a sense of failure.

We as ministers tend to love our congregations. Because of this, our first instinct is to want to all who walk through the door to stay, and to go after those who leave. This is a survival instinct driven by the ego and lower thinking and feeling natures. The reality of the matter is that this is exactly what we should not do. We need to stop, pray, and elevate our thoughts and feelings beyond personal to principle. People leave. It is inevitable. Actually, it's a good thing.

Our hearts (emotion) are aching; our minds (thought) struggle to answer the question, "Why?" Here is where it gets really difficult. Most often, this question is unanswerable. People leave the church for countless reasons. Sometimes they come back, and sometimes they do not. Their reasons can have to do with church politics, taste in worship styles, past church experiences, events going on in their lives... and sometimes even the person who left does not really know why. Asking is futile. It is unlikely you will get the "real" reason, if there is one. Applying pressure does not bring the desired result either.

The title of a best selling women's book on relationships provides the very likely answer, "He's just not that into you (the church...its philosophy, theology, minister, culture, etc.)." If the people wanted to be there they would be there. Not everyone is in alignment with your church or belief system.

When someone does leave, the pain often tears through, and sometimes tears apart the congregation. Speculation and gossip follow. Fingers are pointed and blame is assessed. Fear may arise, especially if others in sympathy for the one, or ones who left, follow. And everything escalates. Now the congregation wants to go after those who left. What else can we do?

If a long time congregant is suddenly absent, it is wise to check in on him or her to see if everything is okay, to see if there is any way you can be there for them; any way the church can

help. Is there anything that is needed, etc. Then follow the lead of the information you receive. If there is something they need, if there is illness or challenge, do what you can. If the congregant is evasive or angry and does not want to work things out, let go...and let God handle it.

It is easier to handle these things when four things have occurred:

1) The church has established a clear identity through its mission, vision and values statements and core beliefs. When these are clear from the beginning the church can avoid problems arising when people with conflicting theologies or philosophies, values and beliefs come and want to change the church to their image and likeness of church. Being clear about who you are and what you believe makes it easier for people to decide if this is the church they want to stay with.

2) The church family is educated in “loving with an open hand.” Because of my own painful experiences, and the errors I have made in trying to “win back” folks who left, I have come to understand the importance of keeping the “hand” of the church open; open to release and open to receive. I teach this concept frequently. I also point out the statistic that one person comes to the church and stays for every twenty-one people who visits the church. This prevents fear or anxiety on the part of the congregation when visitors repeatedly come and do not return. I remind them that we will attract our own as we consistently learn, live and share the principles we teach in Unity. Focus on who you are, and what you do have, on who is there and now who has left.

3) A dispute resolution/reconciliation process is developed. It is then taught and utilized on occasions when it can heal broken relationships within the church, or determine when it is time to release and let go.

4) There is a constant outreach to invite new people of like mind and heart. People come. People go. In today’s culture there are many church shoppers out there and few looking to make a solid commitment. Constantly inviting and looking for new ways to invite and be known in your community is critical. Remember that Unity serves two types of people: Primary path and prayer and inspiration. Relax and enjoy that opportunity.

Chasing after runaway congregation members is about as wise as chasing a runaway lover. If he or she wanted to be with you, he or she would. Rejection is God’s protection. To try to hang on to everyone, adapting and people-pleasing is to adulterate your own church’s mission, vision, values and core beliefs; to water them down. It is counter-productive to the health, growth and well-being of your church.

In spite of all of these words of wisdom, we remember that it will still hurt. Just because it hurts to lose someone does not mean it was not the right and perfect thing for the church. It is critical that the Minister lead their congregation through this with strength, faith and holding to principle. It is so very simple, but that does not mean it is easy, only essential.

Glenda Finnegan

In answer to this, I want to quote Michael Moran in a recent article he wrote for CONTACT. “Unity was meant to be a spiritual lab. Where we boldly discover new Truths and discover new and wonderful ways to portray them.”

Could part of our “lab work” be to contact members when they leave? Would we discover new truths? Should we hold spiritual space for wherever the congregant’s path takes them? Would this provide a re-entry support should a congregant need that? Would it provide caring and positive closure? My past career consisted of many years in retail management. One of the things I learned was, to “listen” to my customers and employees. It was thru their eyes that I got the gift, of another perspective of truth. Many times they would see something that I would miss,

because we were witnessing from different perspectives. The customers could always tell me what was working about how we were implementing our service and what was not. When our idea exchange was over, we all felt better. Listening is a gift we give to those we care about.

Having just come back from “Prayer Chaplain” training, I can see Reverend Le Lanni Burt’s program format working for this as well.

A prayer chaplain “holds spiritual space, lovingly listens, prays, keeps in confidence what is shared.” Except on a need to know basis with permission from the congregant.

In fact, prayer chaplains could be the contact when someone on their contact list leaves. In this way it would provide closure and continuity.

I have truly loved being a prayer chaplain because I have gotten to know so many “truth seekers” as friends and spiritual support.

I am in a small Unity Church now, and it is a gift. I know Reverend Donna (Little) well and she knows me. I also know I am helpful. There have been times in the past when I attended large Unity congregations. They were great too, and I loved the lessons and meditations, but it was much easier to leave. I’m not sure anyone really noticed. There were just so many people! I know I did not get as much out of those experiences, because I didn’t give as much!

In closing, wouldn’t this be another way to grow, while remaining real and intimate? I know, if I can support one more person on their Spirit journey, then it is worth the effort! Thank you for reading this!

Margee Grounds

— Restraining Order: Do Not Pursue

It is always appropriate for the minister and people who have been friendly with those who have stopped coming to church to make contact, of course. A call or a note or e-mail to say “I’ve been thinking about you” and to ask if there are any prayer requests is most always welcomed. However, it has been my experience that people who stop coming to church do so for a variety of reasons...most of which they are apt to feel a bit defensive about, if questioned. Hardly ever will they state the actual reason they have stopped attending—e.g. “I am a night person and I like to sleep in whenever possible” or “I relish the opportunity to go to the beach, go boating, fishing, 4-wheeling, flying my airplane, etc. Church gets in the way.”

The reasons are rarely about the church, but rather about the person. We all make choices about how we spend our time, and it is futile to make someone else’s choices because they are rarely happy with a gift we want them to have instead of the gift they wish to choose.

AND it is true that Unity is not for everyone, nor am I the minister who can meet the needs of everyone who walks in the door. Yet some people will “blame” Unity or me rather than being OK with not resonating with us and desiring to look elsewhere for a more formal or traditional worship experience or luxurious environment.

I tell people in our church that we should never put pressure on folks (which tends to generate guilt) to return, though of course we are remiss if we ignore their absence and fail to let them know they are missed. I never want someone to be sitting in the congregation on a Sunday morning out of a sense of obligation—because that resistant energy dilutes the joy the rest of us feel, and dampens the sense of sacredness in our experience.

In the end, who shows up is God’s business. We can let as much of the world as possible know what Unity stands for. We can let people know that Unity is ready to welcome them with open arms whenever

they want to join us. But ultimately our job, as I see it, is to do our best and stay out of God's way.

Lana Charlton

People come to church for many reasons and leave for many reasons. All too often, those reasons for coming and going are not conscious to the person themselves. We teach Life is Consciousness which has many layers. When a person begins to understand and practice that message they stay and do their inner work or they leave.

People come to Unity and enjoy the great message that teaches God loves unconditionally, heaven is at hand, in fact we teach your whole life can be changed by just changing your mind. Simple, right? The message is powerful, positive, practical and wonderful for those who have not heard it before. "I feel like I have come home" we hear them say. Ironically, home is where we "chop wood and carry water" daily. Home is where the real work occurs, from the inside out. Home is where the daily commitment to transformation occurs.

So do we pursue people who leave the church? Ninety-nine percent of the time I would strongly suggest never pursuing those who choose to leave. Naturally, there are exceptions to questions like this. If I had congregants who had been participating practicing members of the church for over a year and a half and they disappeared, I would find out what had happened with a phone call. That would be as far as my pursuing would go. If people come for a while, get involved a bit, and then quit I send a card expressing that they are missed. But if people leave because the church has too much of this or too little of that, fill in the blank with ten-thousand different things, let them go.

If there has been a dispute or a misunderstanding, invite conversation. Sadly, few people will show up for these conversations. If the problem is personality, altar flowers, or the coffee is cold, these people are looking for a reason to leave and they can only leave by being mad about something. Let them go!

The Unity message teaches transformation at the Christ level which is the "narrow gate" Jesus speaks of. Daily practices like meditation and prayer, forgiveness, being an instrument of peace, that creates this transformation, requires deep daily commitment. It is work. If the message touches too deep, people will find a reason to leave and rarely will it be what they say it is.

Don Donini

I have an entire list that I have created that I share about why people come and go in Unity. Depending on where they place on this list can help Ministers and staff to discern if people that leave Unity should be contacted. I often find that they should be left alone to experience other avenues spiritually after they have left.

John Meeks

I am not quite ready to drive the van. When I was a young Baptist, I remember the Sunday school van that waited outside by house on those days when I played "hooky" from church. It waited outside for five minutes while I look through my bedroom window in my pajamas. When it drove away, I felt both relief and guilt. I was relieved that my Sunday school teacher (who drove the bus) wasn't about to drag me from my Sunday comics and my friends who were staying over for the weekend. I still felt guilty because I knew I was sinning somehow and also because I knew that I would get a postcard—and maybe even a home visit asking why I was absent. I knew that they cared but wondered if they cared a little too much.

When I joined Unity as a teenager, I happily went each Sunday not because there was an inherent obligation to attending but because I wanted to be there with my friends and learn about Truth. If I missed a Sunday, it was not the end of the world.

After the postcards and home visits from the Baptists subsided, I was glad to belong to Unity because I was not subject to the hard sell of such aggressive tactics. I also recall that the church community was different in how it trusted its members and friends to choose their spiritual path—even if it meant going elsewhere.

I noticed people who no longer attended and wondered where they went. I did not consider them ‘acceptable losses’ but knew that others would come seeking what they needed in Unity.

Fast forward a few years and I am on the Board of Directors of my church. In my five years, I see the business underpinnings of my church. Lost members are losses in many ways. We lose not just friends but, to be honest, we also fear losing tithes and offerings. Any business is curious about why people leave and we are quick to point fingers.

The situation can be dire if people are leaving en masse for a reason that goes unexpressed. It would be helpful for a church to find out why. Without prying too much, a casual conversation can reveal some constructive criticism if necessary without begging or cajoling anyone into ‘coming back.’

We don’t have to drive a van to find out.

Tom Wendt

I think the question of whether or not to contact those who disappear from the church radar screen depends somewhat on circumstances. Generally, I’d say, those who leave should be left to their journey as they see fit to have it unfold. However, if I am aware of specific challenges that a congregant is experiencing, such as significant loss or life challenge, then it’s appropriate to attempt contact. I would remind them that their minister is here for them and that their church community misses them and would be glad to offer support. Additionally, if a significant number of moderate or long-term congregants start turning up missing, or if general church attendance is in decline, then it is essential that contact be made to find out what’s going on. So in a minority of instances, I believe that contact is appropriate.

Yet, for most of those who leave, I must remember that each person’s motivation for involvement varies greatly from one individual to another, and it’s quite likely that the reason for belonging was met, which then provides a reason for leaving.

That’s not to say that I don’t perform some emotional and mental gymnastics around the issue. Some of my internal conversations go like this; “Gee, I wonder why they left? Should I call? I wonder if I did something wrong?” On those occasions when a lost sheep returns to the flock, I’ll welcome them back and while I don’t probe, if they are willing to share why they had left, that’s OK by me! I’ve not been told by any returnee that their departure was the result of something I had done, or not done. That’s not to say that people haven’t left the church because of unhappiness with me. It’s just that those individuals seldom return and, I usually know why they left. It seems that most of those who wander off, simply do so because they lost the church habit, life became extremely busy, or one of many other innocuous reasons resulting in their abandoning ship for a while.

We also have a few attendees who have a tradition of coming and going. Just about the time it appears that they’ve finally made the commitment to belong...poof...they’re gone again. Perhaps that’s what they need from our church; permission to come and go as they please, without interference.

And lastly, I don’t make the call because I wish to avoid creating a

church membership who are dependant on my calling them.

Patrick McAndrew

When I first came here to Oklahoma City 8 years ago, I sent letters and made phone calls to most of the people on the phone and mailing list. Only a few people ever returned to the church for a visit. None continued attending for any length of time.

I also send letters or make phone calls to those I notice stop attending. Occasionally I am successful at getting someone to return to the church. Seldom are people comfortable talking about why they stopped coming, especially to the minister. It mostly makes them feel uncomfortable and guilty. Most of the time it is personal or life issues that caused them to stop attending—too busy, want to sleep in, went through a personal crisis and didn't want to bring people down. I think we need to make an attempt or two but no more, when we know someone has stopped attending, especially if it is a A or a B member of your church (that's Gary Simmon's terminology). There are times when it really makes the person feel appreciated that you have noticed them. But at the same time we need to realize that in ally likelihood the majority of time we won't be successful.
