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

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Abstract
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 report 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.

Subject Area
Church work, Visitations (Church work), Pastoral theology

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