

## How to Reclaim Chronic Absentees

Every church has absentees. Sunday school members or even church members who seldom or never attend. Even with the most effective preventative measures, some chronic absenteeism will continue. However, a reasoned approach to this problem can yield positive results. It is possible to reach out in love to these people and reclaim some of them for meaningful participation in Bible Study and church membership.

### **Understand something of how they become inactive.**

In Going: One on One Harry Piland identified a cycle showing how some absentees become chronic absentees.

Unfulfilled Expectations  
Disappointment  
Lack of Ministry  
Further Disappointment  
Lack of Ministry  
Absenteeism  
Drop Out

As you can see, intervention at early stages of this cycle can be productive. In fact, the earlier ministry and contact takes place, the more effective it will likely be.

Some people become inactive or absent because of a spiritual problem. Attendance at Bible Study or Worship is an uncomfortable reminder of their spiritual problem. The problem, spiritual or otherwise, may be deep and difficult to deal with, or it may be simple to address. In either case, an early caring contact is much more likely to produce a positive result.

**A strong, well-organized Sunday school class is a good place to start.** A class with good records, and persons responsible for caring ministries will respond more quickly and effectively.

**Pray for the absentee.** Ask the Sunday school class to pray intentionally for the absentee. They will certainly want to pray on Sunday morning, but some members will commit to pray daily for the absentee.

**Start a new Bible Study group or class.** It may be easier for the absentee to respond to a new class. Embarrassment will be lessened, and the natural excitement of something new will build enthusiasm.

### **Consider a four week prayer/contact/visitation blitz.**

- Week 1: Ask class members to pray daily for absentees. Be sure someone is praying for each absentee.

- Week 2: Ask class members to call all absentees. Again, be sure everyone is called.
- Week 3: Ask class members to send cards or letters to each absentee. Handwritten only, please, and no preprinted address labels.
- Week 4: Ask class members to gather at the church for a meal or snack and visit all absentees.

**Tips on making a visit to an absentee.**

1. Keep the emphasis on prayer. No one would appreciate an accusatory, negative visit. Almost anyone would appreciate a caring visit that asks, “Can I take any prayer concerns back to you Sunday school class?”
2. Take the absentee a small gift, just to let them know you care. A plate of cookies or a cake can smooth over that awkward moment when the absentee realizes that someone from the church is there, and they will have to talk about their absence. Say something like: “We were having some dessert down at the church, and we didn’t want you to be left out.”
3. Expect some anger from the absentee. They may feel that their church let them down in their time of need. And they may be right. Don’t try to ignore that anger. Allow them to express it and deal with it in a gracious manner.
4. Don’t defend or criticize others. You probably don’t know enough about that situation to really know what happened.
5. Ask what it would take for the absentee to come back and participate, once again, in Bible Study.
6. Affirm that the absentee is a person of worth to the church and class.
7. Suggest attending another class if the person would be more comfortable.