

### Preparation for the session

When you get assigned to “go after” a lost family member of your church, you usually ...

*(Circle all that apply)*

- Tense up?
- Pray for listening ears?
- Pray for wisdom?
- Judge?
- Get annoyed?
- Become sad?
- Pray for your efforts?
- Wonder when you will have time?
- Pray that the lost is found?
- Assume it won't work?
- Plan out a timeline of communication?
- Study God's Word for help and guidance?
- Pray that you won't get in the way?
- Wonder if you'll ever get a hold of them?
- Question if the contact information is any good?
- Feel undertrained?
- Feel like you are the wrong person?
- Remember the Word is God's power?
- Think you are assigned too many delinquents?
- Pray for the delinquent?
- Pray that the Word is faithfully communicated?
- Pray for courage?
- Remember that God will be with you?
- Other?

Discuss your responses with one another.



### WATCH CHAPTER 6: OPENING DEVOTION

- Someone responds with prayer, asking God's blessing upon the meeting.



### **WATCH CHAPTER 6, PART 1— “COMMUNICATION OVERVIEW”**

As you watch, consider the following questions.

- What does active listening look like?
  
- Why is it so important?



### **WATCH CHAPTER 6, PART 2— “COMMUNICATION CONTENT”**

- On what does the video encourage elders to focus on when visiting a straying member?
  
- What are some blessings we receive when we attend worship?



### **WATCH CHAPTER 6, PART 3 – “COMMUNICATION TONE”**

- List some of the advice shared regarding the tone of the conversation an elder has with a straying member.
  
- Of all the messages elders share with straying members, which message needs to predominate?



## WATCH CHAPTER 6, PART 4 – “COMMUNICATION TYPES”

### Letters

Please see samples at the end of the guide sheet.

- How are written communications both a blessing and a burden?
  
- The three things a handwritten letter ought to focus on:
  1. **Something** \_\_\_\_\_ **—show them that you care about/ know them.**

*Susan, it was good to see you the other day at the grocery store ...*

*Susan, In the past you were really good at helping out with our school. I was wondering if you had some thoughts on ...*

*Susan, I know that you haven't been feeling well and wanted to check in on you ...*

*Susan, I hope all is well with you. I haven't seen you around in while. I was just writing because I care, and if there is anything I can do or pray for—please don't be afraid to reach out ...*
  2. **The joy of being part of** \_\_\_\_\_ **—point to Jesus (the food).**

*This Sunday pastor really highlighted the peace we have in Jesus. It was very powerful. I know you weren't able to make it, but I just wanted to take a minute and share that with you ...*

*It's been a while since you've been able to receive Christ's personal forgiveness through Jesus' body and blood.*

*This past Sunday, Pastor Smith reminded us how important it is to regularly worship together with other believers. That way we can encourage each other ...*
  3. \_\_\_\_\_
 

*Looking forward to worshiping with you soon/this week/this Christmas season.*

*Our worship service times are ...*

*If I don't see you, I'll try to check back with you to see how things are going.*

*Praying we will be able to worship together again soon.*
  
- What does the use of church letterhead convey to the recipient of a written communication?
  
- Why is it a good idea for both the pastor and teacher to sign a letter sent to a straying school family?

## Phone Calls

- What are some benefits of a phone call when communicating with straying members?

## Voicemail/Answering Machine/Caller ID

- What will an elder want to do in advance of calling a straying member in case he encounters an answering machine or voicemail?

## Social Media

- What are some of the benefits and pitfalls of social media?

## Email and Texting

*Please see samples at the end of the guide sheet.*

- What are some of the benefits and pitfalls of email and texting?



### **WATCH CHAPTER 6, PART 5 – “COMMUNICATION PROCESS”**

- Why is it important to keep the “one sheep” mentality in mind when working with missing members?



### **WATCH CHAPTER 6: CLOSING DEVOTION**

- Someone closes with prayer.



## LETTER SAMPLES

### Mild Encouragement Christmas Greeting (may be handwritten):

*Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.  
– Luke 2:15*

*There is no greater news than to know that Jesus came to be our Savior from sin. God promised a Savior to Adam and Eve, and he announced our Savior's birth through the angels to shepherds and recorded it for our ears to hear. When the shepherds heard the good news, their reaction was one of excitement and joy, but it was also one of action as they went to worship the Lord. We pray that you too are motivated by our God's love, given to us through Jesus. We hope your heart is filled with peace, joy, and forgiveness. We hope to see you in church as we worship together over the good news that our Savior came for us.*

*(worship schedule dates and times)*

*May God richly bless your Christmas!  
In Christ,  
(your first name)*

### Medium Encouragement letter (spells out some specifics):

*Dear (member's name),*

*According to our records you (and your family!) haven't been able to worship with us since (date). If our records are wrong, I apologize. Please let me know. If you haven't been here, we hope that nothing has been keeping you away from worship at (name of church). I'm sending you this letter to encourage you in your use of the means of grace. God desires us to worship him regularly with other believers and to commune at his holy table for the forgiveness of our sins. I hope and pray that all is well with you. I'll look for you in God's house in the upcoming weeks. If I don't see you, I'll check in with you again.*

*In Christ's humble service,  
Elder (name)*

### Stronger Encouragement:

*Dear (member's name),*

*As your brother in Christ and as an elder of (church's name), I am very concerned about your lack of worship attendance. I have encouraged you via letter, phone call, etc. (state dates if able). I hope and pray that you will come back to worship and once again taste and see that the Lord is good. I know you are (busy, without excuses, tired, state their excuse if you know it), but Jesus has a good reason for wanting us to gather together as a family of believers. I hope that you prayerfully make time to worship in the near future. I pray for you every day (actually do it, don't just say it ... maybe even include a handwritten prayer on your letter). I'm here for you if you want to talk. If you would rather reach out to pastor, his number is (church #).*

*Blessings brother or sister,  
In Jesus' service,  
Elder (name)*

### **Stronger Encouragement:**

*“We must pay more careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away.” – Hebrews 2:1*

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

*I’m writing to you because our records at St. John's show that you have not been to worship or taken the Lord’s Supper in quite some time. Maybe you have been worshipping somewhere else, have been away, or not feeling well ... whatever the reason, I wanted to reach out to you and let you know that you are missed.*

*If you have drifted away, I want to encourage you to come back to the Lord’s house. At St. John’s, we have an opportunity each Sunday to hear the good news that we are forgiven through the blood of Christ. We also have the opportunity to grow in God’s grace as the Holy Spirit works in our hearts. I hope and pray that you remember how sweet that gospel is and take time to make coming to God’s house a regular habit again. I look forward to worshipping with you in the near future.*

*In Christ’s humble service,  
Elder (name)*

*Feel free to call me if you would like to visit about anything.  
(Phone number)*

### **Letter if no communication (many faithful efforts must have been attempted and documented before this letter):**

*Dear (member’s name),*

*We are concerned about your relationship with God and his church. Recall that we have encouraged you, telling you that we missed sharing God’s Word with you and the Christian fellowship that comes along with worship. We were looking forward to enjoying your fellowship in the near future.*

*As each week has come and gone, we still have not seen you. God wants to be worshiped and has commanded that we worship him—and he looks for each of his children in the assembly of worshipers. When God’s saints meet on Sunday morning to worship him, you are not there, and it has been \_\_\_\_\_ (a long time). This grieves both God and us. Bear in mind that public worship is outward evidence of the heart that praises God. Think of what we receive from him that makes us want to praise him: chief of which are his love, his forgiveness, and the hope of salvation—which come to us through Jesus Christ.*

*Failure to participate in public worship, unless extenuating circumstances make it impossible to participate—would indicate that a faith problem exists. It is our privilege and duty to help find the solution to the problem. Whatever is burdening you at this time is ours to share with you. God wants us to love and care for one another, this includes offering Christian admonishment when it is needed.*

*In this spirit, we as a Board of Elders will be calling or visiting you in the near future. If you would rather call us and make an appointment to visit, you may do so at (number). If you choose not to visit with us or return our communication, we will assume that you no longer wish to be a part of our congregation and will release you at the (month) Voter’s Meeting.*

*We pray that we will hear from you soon. We pray even more that we see you in church soon!*

*Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching. – Hebrews 10:23–25*

*Yours in the service of our Savior,  
The Board of Elders (Names / Pastor)*

**School Families...** Maybe you have a school and a family who really struggles in their worship attendance. While parent-teacher meetings can talk about a lot of things it is good to tag team with your pastor and or elders to encourage these struggling families to grow in God's grace.

*Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord. – Ephesians 6:4*

*Dear (Parents),*

*We are so blessed to be serving you by sharing God's Word with your child(ren). What a privilege! However, we are concerned that your worship attendance has been so sporadic.*

*Maybe you have been struggling to come to worship for a variety of reasons, or maybe you don't have a "good" reason at all—you've just fallen out of the habit. Whatever the case, we want to remind you of the many blessings our Lord promises when we worship together. Regularly coming to the Lord's house is a God-pleasing thing. It feeds our faith and soothes our soul with the precious gospel of Jesus. Coming to worship is a blessing to you and your family. Coming to worship encourages other believers. Coming to worship prepares us for heaven and all the challenges we face until we get there.*

*If there is something going on that we are not aware of, please don't be afraid to communicate with us (your child's teacher, principal, or pastor). In other words, let us know how we can help.*

*In the meantime, you will be in our prayers, and we look forward to seeing you in God's house.*

*God's blessings!*

*In Christ's service,*

*Pastor \_\_\_\_\_ Principal \_\_\_\_\_ Teacher \_\_\_\_\_*

## **Phone Calls**

- Be prepared with what to say! Don't just wing it.
- Have pen and paper ready for notes. Include date and time of when you called. Some elders even take screenshots of their phone for records.
- If the number is no longer in service, flag it and report it to your secretary, elders, or whoever updates the information.
- Call the church office to see if there is another number you can try or do some networking to find a number that works.

## The call:

- Introduce yourself clearly—your name
- Tell them who you are with—the church’s name and that you’re an elder
- Tell them why you are calling—don’t accuse ... be gentle, humble, and ready to listen ... let them know you care
- Listen ... listen some more if needed ... don’t talk the whole time.
- Assess what has been said on their end and reply ... your goal is simply to let them know you care, you miss them, and you would like to worship with them/make sure they are being fed spiritually. Invite and encourage them to worship sharing days and times.
- Ask them what service they might attend and let them know you’ll look for them to say hi.
- Thank them for their time.
- Write a simple summary of the conversation that can be emailed to the pastor or shared at an elders’ meeting.

**If there is no answer, leave a message.** If they don’t recognize your number, they may simply be screening calls because of robocalls or the like. Try again later in the day, because now they know who you are and are more likely to pick up. You don’t need to leave more than two messages a week.

Here is an example of what you might say in your message:

*Hi, this is Paul, a member at Peace Lutheran (or I serve on the elders). I was just calling to touch base with you and see how you were doing. We haven’t seen you at worship in a while, and we hope all is well. Feel free to call me back at (phone #) (or shoot me a text), otherwise I’ll reach out to you at another time. Just a reminder worship is at (times/date). Blessings on the day.*

If they don’t have voicemail, shoot them a text. It might be something simple like, “Hey, this is Bill from (your church). Give me a call when you have some free time. My number is ... Thanks!”

Record any messages or texts that were left.

## Social Media

All communication done on social media should be done privately. Be sure to consider your audience—is this the best platform for the person you are trying to reach? Don’t use this platform of communication if you are not familiar with how it works. You should also be a “friend” before you message someone on *Facebook*.

Social media messages should be simple and encouraging.

*Hey Chris, I’m writing because we miss seeing you over at (church). I hope things are ok with you. I know you are in school and have been working a lot lately to pay for school, but it would be great to have you with us again soon. This Sunday we are celebrating Reformation. Communion will be served in both services. Hope you can make it!*



## Texting

Use a text message to encourage a phone call. Keep the message very simple.

*Hey John. (Your name) from (your church) here. Hope all is well with you! Give me a call if you would when you have the chance.*

## Sample priority listing of missing members in your church

### Number of weeks missing from worship:

- *3–4 weeks:* Members need to be on your radar as missing. (God willing, they will be in church the 5th week—if so, say hi to them and make them feel welcomed. See Chapter 12 video, “Rejoice”.)
- *Week 5:* The missing member is highlighted, and information is shared with someone entrusted to care for missing family members in their church. Don’t necessarily wait for a meeting to do this.
- *5–10 weeks:* Handwritten cards go out, text, social media, maybe a personal visit. (If you don’t have a lot of “lost” to visit, be as personal as possible.) Maybe a simple phone call is all that needs to be done. Be very *gentle* and *loving* with your first contact.
- *11 wks.–3 months:* phone calls, cards, maybe a personal visit
- *3–6 months:* phone calls, cards, personal visits
- *6–9 months:* phone calls, cards, personal visits, maybe official letters
- *12 months–2 years:* phone calls, cards, personal visits, official letters from church, possibly a removal letter?
- *2–5 years:* Is there any fruit?
  - “Produce fruit in keeping with repentance” (Matthew 3:8 NIV).
  - “The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire” (Matthew 3:10 NIV).

### Please Note:

- In no way is it suggested that you can’t have delinquents at your church for longer than five years. But if you have faithfully searched for the lost for five years and they haven’t come back, something more is wrong.
- Missing member ministry is messy. It’s not cut and paste. Your pastor will help you rightly divide law and gospel at times like this. In Chapter 7, general guidelines are given on how to handle some of the *reactions* from the lost.



## FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION

Are the elders the only ones communicating with the missing family members in your church? Why or why not?

### Something to think about ...

Is there a way that you could have others in your church contact the lost without even looking for them? For instance, consider the following letter. A Ladies Aid sent it out to the 364 women in their congregation. Their goal was to encourage the women in their congregation to consider ways in which they could serve their Lord while at the same time encouraging growth in the Word. They sent it to every woman 18-101. The women then made follow up calls, understanding that the fellow sisters that they were calling may not be regular in their church attendance. Yet from one sister to another, they encouraged their family to find a way to live their faith and to participate in the church, even if “all” they could do was pray that the mission of the church be carried out. After reading the letter, consider how your women’s group might be able to do something similar in your congregation.

*Greetings in the name of our Savior Jesus,*

*For 110 years the St. John’s Ladies Aid has faithfully served our congregation. We exist to reflect Jesus’ love of serving others no matter who they are, but especially the family of believers here at St. John’s. We do this as a group in many ways, always giving the glory back to our Savior, who first loved us.*

*Over the years we have served our Lord in many ways, including supporting our called workers, participating in the gospel ministry of St. John’s, and showing love to our members (shut-ins, school families, college students, hospitalized, other). We love to work through our synod to support both home and world missions and the missionaries in those places. We also support the various WELS-related ministries Christian Life Resources, Kingdom Workers, Christian Aid and Relief and more. Finally, we look for opportunities in our community to let our light shine, so that others may know the love of Jesus.*

*One of the most visible ministries we do as a Ladies Aid is serve meals for families at funerals. We set up, bring a salad or dish to pass, and then take down so that the grieving family can visit with their family and friends. Over the years our group has shrunk. This has happened for a couple of reasons. One, as times goes on, members of the Ladies Aid have grown older and are no longer able to serve the way they once did. (God has also called many of our members to heaven over the years.) Two, we are not adding to the Ladies Aid the way we once did. For whatever the reason, many of the women in our congregation don’t participate in our group. Maybe you didn’t know you could join or what we do. Perhaps you don’t have time off when we meet. Or, maybe God has called you to focus on other things besides Ladies Aid at this time. To God be praise!*

*The purpose of this letter is to invite all the women in our congregation to consider how they may serve their Lord by helping us serve your brothers and sisters at funerals and other functions overseen by Ladies Aid. In the next month, someone from the St. John’s Ladies Aid will ask you if you would be willing to help us serve. We will ask if you could help in the morning, afternoon, evening, or “anytime”; we will ask if you could help us with setup or take down; we will ask if you are interested in bringing a dish to pass from time to time. We are not looking for you to commit to a specific date or*

*event. We just want to invite more of our sisters in faith to help us serve our families in need. Please, prayerfully consider how you might be able to help the Ladies Aid as we love one another. If you want to join the Ladies Aid, we would be honored to have you.*

*We also want to take this time to encourage you to consider helping at our school events (cleaning days, the musical, or basketball games, etc.). You could participate in Parent-Teacher Society (PTS). Or, you could volunteer at our high school, Lakeside, for various events during the year. You could also serve in other ways around our church (greeting, work days, the parish nurse program, canvassing, etc.). At the very least, we ask you to please keep the mission of the church in your prayers. If you have an idea or way in which we could serve, please email the church office.*

*We realize that everyone is busy! The important thing is that we are grounded in Christ's love and forgiveness. As we are linked to Christ, we are called to produce fruit, otherwise, the body of Christ hurts. By letting our lights shine, God is glorified. Please consider how you might share the blessings and talents that the Lord has given to you.*

*In Christ's Service,*

*St. John's Ladies Aid*