



### WATCH CHAPTER 9: OPENING DEVOTION

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



### WATCH CHAPTER 9, PART 1: "OFFICIAL ACTS: THE WAITING GAME"

- As you watch, write down a list of thoughts and encouragements to keep in mind as you wait for a straying member's response to your visit.



### WATCH CHAPTER 9, PART 2: "OFFICIAL ACTS: THE WAITING GAME IS OVER"

- After repeated invitations for a missing member to "come home" are rejected, what's the next step?
- Discuss and define these official acts of the church:
  - Transfer of Membership* -
  - Release from Membership* -
  - Removal from Membership* -
- **TRUE or FALSE** It's good to transfer missing members to other WELS churches.
- **TRUE or FALSE** Releases and removals ought to bring a sense of relief to a congregation.



## FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION

- Examine your constitution and assess the ways in which membership can be terminated in your congregation:
  1. Are you currently following your constitution's protocol?
  2. Do your "categories" for termination align with other WELS churches in your area?
- Look over the "official acts" letters currently used by your congregation. Compare them with the additional suggestions on pages 2-4.



## WATCH CHAPTER 9: CLOSING DEVOTION

- Someone closes with prayer.



## SAMPLE LETTERS

### Sample Transfer Letter

Copies sent to:

- Church to which the members are transferring
- Members who are transferring
- Copy retained for your own church records

*Date*

*St. So and So Lutheran Church  
1234 Strait Street  
Anywhere, US 12345*

*Dear Pastor So and So,*

*With the acknowledgement of our elders, John and Jane Doe, and their baptized children, Suzi and Timmy, were granted a transfer of membership from our fellowship to yours.*

*It is our prayer that their faith will be strengthened by the Gospel and that their Christian service will be a blessing to your congregation as you continue to serve them with the Word and Sacraments.  
In Christ's Service,*

*Pastor Such and Such*

*SS/sms  
att.: church records  
cc: John and Jane Doe*

## Sample Release Letter (to a “heterodox” church)

Copies sent to:

- Members who are being released
- Church to which the members are being released (if known)
- Copy retained for your own church records

*Date*

*Mr. and Mrs. John and Jane Doe  
1234 Strait Street  
Anywhere, US 12345*

*Dear John and Jane,*

*At a meeting of our elders on January 1, 2000, a release from membership at Such & Such Lutheran Church of (city), (state) was granted. The constitution of Such & Such Lutheran Church requires that a release from membership receive formal approval from the Voters’ Assembly, which was granted at the Voters’ Assembly of (date).*

*In all things we commend you to God’s gracious care.*

*If you desire to return to Such and Such Lutheran Church or join a congregation of our fellowship in the future, we stand ready to discuss Scripture with you and provide any help and direction we can.*

*In Christ’s Service,*

*Pastor Such and Such*

*SS/sms  
cc: St. So and So Church  
att.: church records*

## Sample Release Letter (unaware of any new church affiliation)

Copies sent to:

- Members who are being released
- Copy retained for your own church records

*Date*

*Mr. and Mrs. John and Jane Doe  
1234 Strait Street  
Anywhere, US 12345*

*Dear John and Jane,*

*At a meeting of our elders on (date), a release from membership at Such and Such Lutheran Church of (city), (state) was granted. The constitution of (church name) requires that a release from membership*

*receive formal approval from the Voters' Assembly, which was granted at the Voters' Assembly of (date).*

*Though we are not able to serve you spiritually anymore, we pray that you have found a Christian church in which the Word of God is taught in its truth and purity and the sacraments of Baptism and Lord's Supper are administered rightly. God willing, you have regular opportunities to hear the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ both at home and at a local congregation.*

*In all things we commend you to God's gracious care.*

*If you desire to return to (your church's name) or join a congregation of our fellowship in the future, we stand ready to discuss Scripture with you and provide any help and direction we can.*

*In Christ's Service,*

*Pastor Such and Such*

*SS/sms*

*att.: church records*

*cc: St. So and So Church*

## **NO Sample Removal Letter**

Generally, removal from the congregation's membership roster occurs either when a person has passed away or, after due diligence, no contact can be made with the missing member. It would seem self-evident that in either case, no letter is needed.

## **NO Sample Excommunication Letter**

Copies sent to:

- Member who is under discipline (registered mail)
- Copy retained for your own church records

Formal communication ought to take place throughout the process that may lead to one's excommunication. It is imperative that the pastor and elders leave a "paper trail" so that the process can be verified in the case of an appeal.

When the elders move toward excommunication, the member under discipline needs to be aware of the proceedings and be given ample opportunity to appear before the church. A letter indicating that the matter of their excommunication is on the agenda before the congregation's voters' assembly should be mailed to the member under discipline by registered or certified mail. If the congregation proceeds with the excommunication, the action must proceed by unanimous vote and be properly recorded in the minutes of the voters' assembly. A letter informing the person of the action of the congregation ought also to be sent by registered or certified mail.

While congregations, elders, and pastors may wish for a form letter by which to communicate such a serious action, the matter of excommunication is so varied by circumstance and begs for such personal compassion that one form letter would not suffice. This letter needs to communicate the deep love and concern that the congregation holds for those whose words and actions have placed themselves outside of the kingdom.