



#### WATCH VIDEO 4: *Members who left for another church*



#### REFLECTION: Family and friendship connections sometimes bring former members who left the church back for family events and even holidays.

*Visits by former members who joined a different church usually do not indicate a desire to leave their current church or to return to our congregation. A visit of such former members is often the result of invitations to worship by friends or family in our church. Our members who invited them hope that their guests will have a positive experience and also hear the message of our church. Remember to greet guests brought by your members, whether the guests are former members or not. The “welcome” conversation can be an opportunity to become reacquainted with former members.*

Hebrews 12:14

Make every effort to live in peace with everyone and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord.

Galatians 5:22-24

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

- What do these passages have to say about the way we conduct ourselves when a former member attends our church as a visitor?

*These encounters are opportunities to conduct ourselves with Spirit-given love, forbearance, kindness, gentleness, and self-control. This is one of those occasions to live in peace with former members.*

Mark 16:16

Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.

- What do we hope for everyone who visits our church?

*Ultimately, we want everyone to believe in Jesus and be saved.*

- What is our comfort if someone has left our church and joined a different Christian church, professing faith in Jesus?

*We believe in the invisible church, the communion of saints. We can't see faith, but where people hear the Word and receive the Sacraments, the Lord still works saving faith.*



## **REFLECTION: Seeing people who left our church can be awkward for members who remember the former fellowship.**

*The departure of a member who changes religions can be painful, especially for the member's family. It may be a new experience for relatives not to be able to commune together. Our communion practice is our most obvious reminder that doctrine matters. We prize the teachings of our church and may feel defensive or frustrated with someone who left. Still, encountering former members is an opportunity to show the grace of Jesus as well as sincere Christian love*

1 Corinthians 13:4-7 Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

- What ill feelings might persist in the congregation toward a former member who joined a different religion?

*There may be frustration at our failed attempts to dissuade the person who left. Defensiveness about rejection of our teachings and negative memories may also persist. (Students may have other examples of ill feelings.)*

- How does Christian love help us overcome our ill feelings when a former member returns for a visit?

*We focus on treating others with patience and kindness, always hoping that the person may someday see things differently.*

To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everyone else, Jesus told the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector in Luke 18:9-14.

- What is the perception we might communicate if we joke about a former member “finally seeing the light”?

*That we look down on them and are self-righteous. Confidence in the truth is a good thing, but expressed in the wrong way it can be arrogance.*

1 Peter 3:15-16 In your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander

- If the former member has turned their back on religion and turned away from the Christian faith, in what ways does God want us to respond to them if we encounter them as visitors?

*We speak to them gently and respectfully while pointing to Jesus who gives us hope, so that we do not fit their stereotypes of Christians. Sometimes those who turned away may realize that their criticism of Christians is not true.*



### **Reflection: Sometimes former members rejoin the congregation.**

*Sometimes they return, disillusioned by the church they joined or because they recognized something they lost when they left our church. Some former members return when their spouse dies. How we welcome former members when they visit can help them return some day.*

Colossians 4:2-6      Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful. And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains. Pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should. Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.

How can we be wise toward former members who visit our church?

*Pray for their return. Think about what to say to them when you meet them. Make the most of opportunities to build bridges and keep the church door open for their return.*