

How to Keep Those

You Reach

Prepared by: Rick Warren, Saddleback Church | Last Revised: November 24, 2009

The following material was made available earlier on the Saddleback website resource page.

I. FACTS ABOUT MEMBERSHIP LOSS IN THE AVERAGE CHURCH:

Annually

_____ % transfer out of town

_____ % by death

_____ % by reversion

Of those lost by reversion, _____ % were those who joined the same year.

1 Reason for dropping out! _____

EXAMPLE: 750 MEMBER CHURCH

Can expect to lose at least 75 members (10%). You'd need 75 more to join just to break even!

In the average church, about _____ to _____ % of all visitors will become members in 9 to 12 months.

That means you'd need _____ visitors annually or _____ a week just to break even!

TWO STRATEGIES

You need to ...

1. Increase _____

AND

2. Increase _____

The Two Key Factors in Keeping People

1. _____

2. _____

II. IN ORDER TO DEVELOP AN ASSIMILATION PROCESS, YOU NEED TO:

1. Decide what is

2. Decide what is

3. Develop structures to

4. Learn to consolidate

HOW TO KEEP THOSE YOU REACH

Rick Warren

Some facts about membership loss in the average church.

If you're a typical church then annually two to three percent transfer out of town. That's if you're typical. If you live in an urban area it can be as high as 15-20% who can move out of town in an urban area. But across the United States, 2-3% of your members will transfer out of town.

Annually one to two percent will die. In Saddleback valley, since we're a yuppie church we do about ten to one, weddings to funerals.

Two to six percent transfer out by reversion -- they backslide. They just quit coming. That's typical across the board. It's higher in some areas, lower in some areas. Of those who are lost by reversion, 85% of them were those who joined the same year. You've grabbed them and you've lost them in the same year. Eighty-five percent of your people who back out of your church, back out the first year that they come.

The number one reason for dropping out is no permanent friendships. That's the number one reason people leave your church. They never really stick. They never really fit. They don't develop permanent friendships.

Example: If you have a church of 750 members, not attenders *members*, you can expect to lose, if you're a typical church, about 75 members or about 10% through transfer, death, reversion. That means you need 75 new members to join just to break even. In the average church about 12-15% of all visitors will become members in 9-12 months. Approximately 10%. That means if you're this hypothetical church of 750 members you'd need 550 visitors annually, or 11 a week, just to break even. That's not growth, that's just to maintain what you've got!

There are two strategies and you need to do both of these.

1. Increase your visitor flow.

There's only one way you build membership: through visitors. If you don't have visitors you don't have members. You've got to get the visitors up. The biggest single difference between growing and non-growing churches I can summarize in one word -- invite. Growing churches invite. Non-growing churches don't invite. Seventy to ninety percent of all visitors who come in the typical church come because of invitation -- personal invitation. Seventy to ninety percent. That's the number one way people come to church. They were invited by friends.

It's interesting that that is the number one reason they come to church but only 9.7% of new members say that having friends in the church caused them to join. Up to 90% of the people said "I've come to your church because somebody invited me," but of those, only about 10% said "I made the decision to join because my friends were in the church." They made the decision to join on other factors. Like preaching, the music, the program, those kind of things. People don't join a church just because their friends go there. They will visit a church because their friends go there but they don't join it.

You need to increase your visitor flow. Your most significant way of growth in your church is not your first converts but it's the second wave of converts you win who have relationships with the first converts you won. If you're starting a new church, the first people you reach are not your biggest wave of growth. The biggest wave of growth are the people you reach because you've reached those folks and the contacts they have. That's why we use advertising to get the first wave and we use relationships to get the second wave. You need to increase your visitor flow.

2. Increase your retention.

You need to learn to keep those you reach. There are two factors in keeping people:

- 1) Enlist them in a small group, and
- 2) Give them a job, a ministry.

If you get somebody in a small group and you give them something to do they'll stick. I've said many times on Sunday mornings, "You need to be in a small group. If you don't get involved in a small group, if all you do is come on Sunday morning, if you're here two years from now I'll be surprised. We just don't expect you to stick."

Never confuse a crowd with a church. A crowd is not a church. A crowd can be turned into a church and you've got to get crowds in order to build a big church, but a crowd is not a church. So we're not kidding ourselves. When we have, counting adults and children maybe 3000 people, of that we know that many of those people are just considering us. They're looking in and checking us out. Wondering, "Am I going to float on through or am I going to stay with this." They are a crowd. But you turn crowds into congregations. And you turn congregations into core. That's how you build your church.

You need to increase your visitor flow and you need to increase your retention by enlisting them in a small group and giving them a ministry or job.

In order to develop an assimilation process by which you reach and keep people you need to decide four things:

1. You need to decide what is expected of membership.

You need to spell out "What does it mean to be a member of this church?" What are the expectations? What are the benefits? What are the requirements? What are the blessings? A pastor friend actually has a document that you sign. It has seven expectations of three priorities. This is what's expected of you if you join this church. These are the three priorities that you're expected to make the priorities in your life as a member of this church.

John Maxwell gave me this. This is what it means to be a member of Skyline: "You give up your rights, pay up your tithes, pick up your ministry, cheer up your brothers and back up your pastor."

You give up your rights -- that's servanthood

You pay up your tithes -- that's obedience

You pick up your ministry -- that's teamwork

You cheer up your brothers -- that's encouragement

You back up your pastor -- that's loyalty

Everyone learns that when they join that church.

You need to spell out what's expected of membership when they join. A name on the role with no expectations is worthless.

2. Decide what is the end result you want to see in the lives of your members.

What's the bottom line? We say at Saddleback we are in the disciple development business. We have the job of producing disciples. What is a disciple? What is the profile of a disciple? What do we want to see? You need to clarify that in your mind. What are the expectations? What do you want to see tangibly in the members of your church?

3. You need to develop structures to encourage commitment.

Commitment is not automatic. You've got to ask for it. Longevity in a church does not necessarily presume commitment. I've been in churches where people have been members 20-30 years and they're no more committed to the pastor, the philosophy of ministry, to the Lord, to the church than anybody else. Longevity does not equal commitment. You've got to develop structures that encourage commitment to the Lord, the church, to the philosophy of ministry and those kind of things.

4. You need to learn to consolidate on the run.

A lot of churches reach a bunch of people and then say, "Let's stop for a while, cut back on evangelism and disciple those we've got." You lose momentum. When the Spirit is blowing, go with it. You don't know how long it's going to be. You don't know when God's going to decide to put His hand on some other church. If people are ripe, harvest for as long as you can. You need to learn to consolidate on the run without losing momentum or slowing down. That's very important.

At Saddleback we have, for a number of years, been using a baseball diamond to describe the Saddleback membership process. We call this the Game of Life. It's the most important game you'll ever play. We want a guy to get at bat. Then we want him to go around to first base, second base, third base and then home -- home run. Each of these represent a developmental stage in his life. Each of them represents a milestone for Christian growth.

First place, we want to get him to bat. How do you get Saddleback Sam to bat? How do you even get him to come to church? Getting him to come to church is getting him up to bat.

How about if we put a track in his window that said "Play baseball or go to hell." Will that reach Sam?

How about if we send a stranger to his door at night who says, "Come play baseball this week with a bunch of people you've never met before." Will he come? No.

Will this Saddleback Sam watch Christian television?

Will he listen to Christian radio? Face it, Christians watch Christian TV and listen to Christian radio.

You can fly a blimp over his house and drop tracts that says "Play baseball!!"

Sam has all kinds of excuses for not getting into the game. He says,

"I once had a bad experience in another ballpark."

"I got burned by another team."

"All baseball players are hypocrites. They don't really like the game. They're just swinging."

"As a young kid, my parents forced me to play little league and I decided when I grew up I would never again touch a bat."

"I'm afraid I'd strike out and embarrass myself."

What is our strategy to get Sam just to come to home plate? Just to come to bat? B-A-T Three things:

1. **Brought** by a friend. Even though we are a high visibility, high advertising church still the vast majority of the people in our church come through friends or relatives. Study of 15,000 people proved over 90% came because a friend or relative invited them.

2. **Attracted** by advertising. We use advertising.

3. **Through special events.** Every summer we do an annual wedding renewal service. We remarried about 60 couples this year. We turned the whole service into a wedding and served wedding cake and had music, a professional. We invite people to wear their original wedding gowns. I wear a tuxedo once a year. It's a real special thing. We said, What about people who eloped and never had a church wedding? What about people who got married and now are Christians. They'd like to have a Christian wedding? What about people who are living together? We put a full page ad in the paper: "Have you always wanted to get married in a church?" No cost, no charge. Maybe they got married younger and would like to do a church wedding? Maybe they just went before a justice of the peace? We invite them to come to the wedding service. That's a special event. We give to each of our couples nicely printed invitations that they can send out. Last year one lady brought 62 non Christian relatives to her wedding renewal service because she had eloped. She invited them all. In the service, I not only do the service for those in the front but I invite those in the audience. Her parents stood up and held hands and renewed vows. She said she walked out later and saw them hugging and kissing and walking arm in arm and said in 22 years she never had seen her parents kiss or hug until that service. We use special events to attract the unchurched. We get them to bat.

Go around the bases. First base is Getting to know Christ. "Salvation". Salvation is first base. We want them to become a genuine Christian at first base.

Second base is Growing in Christ. We don't want them to just become a genuine Christian we want them to become a growing Christian. "Stability". We get them to know Christ at the first base and get them growing in Christ at second base.

Third base is Giving to Christ. We want them to become a giving Christian. I think if you had to summarize the Christian life in one word the word is "give" -- give your life, lose your life to find it. God so loved the world that He gave. You can give without loving but you cannot love without giving. The Christian life is summarized in one word -- give. Third base is "Service". We want them to begin giving out. Not just growing but giving out.

We believe in missions. We have a goal to start at least one daughter church a year. Another goal is to send out 200 missionaries out of our church by the year 2000. Actually send them out from our church. We've already sent out several, some even this year on short term mission. We say that churches should be judged on their sending capacity not their seating capacity. That's why a home run is ...

Going for Christ. The Bible says in Matthew 28 the Great Commission. It's the Great Commitment to the Great Commandment and the Great Commission is a Great Church. Going for Christ is home plate.

First Base is membership. We want them to come to know Christ and become a member by First Base.

Second Base is Maturity. That's our second objective. (Our first objective is just to get them in the membership. The second objective is maturity.)

The third objective is Ministry. Maturity is not enough. It's not the end of the Christian life. Maturity is always for Ministry in Scripture. Not just to set and soak and sour but to get up and do something with your life. Give out.

Our fourth base line, coming home, is Missions. They become Great Commissioned Christians.

Those are the four objectives as we take people around the bases, We get them to bat and on Sunday morning, who's the pitcher? I am. I want this guy to hit a home run -- at least to get to first base. What kind of ball would you throw Saddleback Sam?

I can throw a hard ball: Turn or burn or you're going to fry while we go to the sky! He'd strike out. He wouldn't come back.

I could throw him a curve ball. I could use religious terms: sanctification, justification, redemption, propitiation. An intellectual trip. He wouldn't come back.

No, on Sunday morning I just throw a slow ball. Just lob it over, a soft ball. Personal, practical, positive. It's encouraging. You want to get them to first base.

How do you judge maturity? What are the signposts for maturity at each level?

- 1st Base**
- B** - Born again and Baptized. *"Ye must be born again."*
 - A** - Added to the church. Acts 2:47, *"And the Lord added daily to the church."*
 - S** - Sunday attendance. Hebrews 10:25 *"Don't forsake the assembling of yourselves."*
 - E** - Eager to grow. 1 Peter 2:2 *"Desire the sincere milk of the word that you may grow."*

Those are the four things we look for at first base. Has he been born again and baptized? Has he been added to the church? Is he coming on Sunday morning? Is he eager to grow? If he's got that far we say he's in the ball game. He's not involved in anything else but he's saved, he's baptized, he's added to the church, he's coming on Sunday morning and he's hungry -- he wants to grow. He's at first base.

How do you get to second base? There are four things we look for at second base.

- 2nd Base**
- B** - Basic grasp of the Bible. An overview.
 - A** - Attending a small group. If you're not in a small group you're not at second base.
 - S** - Studying God's word daily. A daily quiet time. Every time a person makes a recommitment in our church I send them an article I wrote on how to have a daily quiet time. I think that's the most important thing that a person who has just recommitted his life needs to do -- to start a daily quiet time.
 - E** - Enjoying Fellowship. Of course, if he is in a small group he/she is enjoying fellowship.

That's what we're looking for at second base. If you're got these four things down -- a basic grasp of the Bible, attending a small group, studying God's word daily, enjoying fellowship -- you will be growing in Christ. Those are the signposts that we're looking for to say a person has made it to second base and on their way to maturity.

- 3rd Base**
- B** - Bringing my tithe. I'm a giving Christian, tithing. 1 Cor. 16:2 *"On the first day of each week..."*
 - A** - Active in a ministry. If you're not actively serving in a ministry, you're not at third base. Spiritual gifts.
 - S** - Sharing my faith. 1 Pet. 3:15-16 *"Always be ready to give an answer..."*

E - Enlisted in a prayer team. This is a new commitment I've made to try to enlist every person in our church on some prayer chain, involved in a prayer chain and praying for other people.

These are four ways to "give out". I give out financially, I give in ministry, I give out in sharing my faith, and I give out in intercession and praying for other people. If you have those sign posts in your life you're at third base.

Home

H - a Heart for the world. That's a perspective for world evangelization, that they become Great Commissioned world Christians.

O - Operating in love. Paul says, If I have not love everything else is worthless. The culmination is, Am I sounding brass and tinkling cymbal or am I operating in love. This is servanthood.

M - Mobilized for Missions. One of our goals is eventually, every summer, our attendance will dip by 25% and have 25% of our members out on the mission field in some short term service -- all over.

E - Encouraging others. To what? To go around the ball diamond -- reproduction, multiplication. Encouraging others to go around the bases.

We have Class 101, 201, 301, 401. This is a basic seed germ of the third strategy at Saddleback. This has been on our plan from Day One. Saddleback is built on three pillars.

1. Celebration Service -- for the first couple of years that's all we had.

2. Small group Ministry -- We have over 100 lay pastors. We start small groups that meet all over, every day of the week, different times, different places. This is really the heartbeat of our church. Many of you in small churches have a hard time getting small groups started. In a small church people don't recognize the need for it. The church is a small group. When you only have 60, 75, 80 people, they think, "I don't need anymore intimacy than that!" You'll find that once your church begins bringing in massive quantities of new people all of a sudden people will say, "I don't feel like I know anybody anymore." And there's a felt need and small groups can take off in your church.

3. Ministry Training School. This is basically a college type curriculum, not for credit in a college, but for the training of our own people. There are four levels like in college (100, 200, 300, 400 level courses)

100 Level Course are evangelistic classes. They would be classes along the first base line -- getting to first base. It might be an aerobics class with a devotional at the end. It could be an underwater scuba diving class with a devotional with it. It could be any kind of adult education class that would attract the attention of the community that we could then share Christ with them.

200 Level Courses are Christian education courses. They help people on this Maturity based line. Courses on basic doctrine, on overview of the Old Testament, New Testament, Bible characters, prayer, anything that would help develop the personal Christian life in growth.

300 Level courses are equipping courses. These are classes along the Ministry level. The purpose is to train for ministry. They'd be classes on How to be a Lay Pastor, How to Lead a Small Group, How to be Involved in Music Ministry, How to Start an Evangelistic Outreach to the Military or any number of courses that would be equipping courses on training people for a particular ministry.

400 Level courses are expansion courses. It's the Great Commission. These would be classes on Missions, Leadership, Church growth. Our church planters could take classes like these on development for

long range training and actually going in the ministry. We've got lay people in our church right now who will be on staff within five years, no doubt about it.

You need to start basic core classes. There are four classes I want every member of our church to go through. These classes are available on a monthly basis, a repetition basis. They are four week classes each and they're taught on a monthly basis. Theoretically you could go through all four classes in four months.

Class 101 is Intro to Membership. That's the basic membership class. We cover these things: Born again and baptized, Added to the church, Sunday attendance, Eager to Grow. We cover the statement, the strategy, the structure of the church. The two most important classes in your church are the New Christian class and the New Member class. Pastor, you ought to teach those for as long as you can. They are the two most important classes in your church.

Class 201 is Intro to Maturity. This is a basic Christian Growth class. You need to decide, What are the basics that we want everybody in our church to know about? The wheel illustration from the Navigators: Witnessing, Fellowship, Prayer, Bible Study, Quiet Time -- those kinds of things. Basic four week class on what every Christian needs to know.

Class 301 is the first of the 300 level courses on Equipping. Intro to Ministry. How to Share Your Faith, a Basic Overview of Spiritual Gifts, (another class we teach periodically on spiritual gifts is a 12-week course) Prayer, Sharing Your Faith, Stewardship. God has called every member to be a minister.

Class 401 is Intro to Missions. We give an overview of the Great Commission. An overview of World Missions, where we've been, where we're going, understanding of our daughter churches, the Saddleback philosophy of planting daughter churches, operating in love, mobilizing for missions, encouraging others.

What we've done is take a simple diagram and put everything we expect on one piece of paper so everybody can now figure out, What's next? Everybody can evaluate themselves: Am I at 2nd base, 3rd base, home plate? Our membership certificates have the baseball diagram screened on the back. It subtly says to everybody "I'm in membership, I've got to first base. But I'm a long way from a home run."

You need to qualify what's expected of a member and what you want to see as a result.