

# RETAINING CHURCH MEMBERS

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## Membership Declines

Baptized membership in the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod in 2012 was 2,196,788, reflecting a decline of 35,070. Communicant membership was 1,707,509 with a decline of 24,103. It is discomfoting to report that membership declines have been taking place for the last forty years!

## Inactive Members

Vilfredo Pareto, an Italian economist, gave the business world his “20-80 Law of Productivity”. He determined that 20% of business customers produce 80% of income. Carrying the law over to other groups such as clubs, organizations, churches, etc., it is found that a small number of members usually impact total productivity. Adolf Hitler divided the constituents of Nazi Germany into “Zealots, Lukewarm, Traitors”. A clever clergyman once described church members in thirds: “Workers, Shirkers, Jerkers”. Even though every church member normally is not aboard the train of productivity, it is nevertheless the task of pastoral and congregational stewardship efforts to get as many aboard as possible. Inactive, non-engaged members tend to lapse.

## Activating Members

Some inactive members may not fully understand and believe the Gospel. Such should be evangelized through personal visitations. Others, who are repentant Gospel believing Christians, may have simply fallen into a rut of inactivity with a complacent attitude concerning congregational activity. One thing which can be done to activate such dormant Christians is to make them aware of their personal spiritual gift(s). Every member possessing the Christian faith has at least one. Some more than one. (1Cor. 12:1; 14:1)

## A Sampling of Gifts

- |                  |                            |
|------------------|----------------------------|
| > Proclamation   | > Mercy                    |
| > Teaching       | > Discernment              |
| > Exhortation    | > Extraordinary Faith      |
| > Wisdom         | > Miracles                 |
| > Knowledge      | > Healing                  |
| > Serving        | > Exorcism                 |
| > Helping        | > Tongues & Interpretation |
| > Leadership     | > Celibacy                 |
| > Administration | > Voluntary Poverty        |
| > Giving         | > Martyrdom                |

## Identifying Personal Gifts

An instrument, “*Spiritual Gifts Identification*”, is available for identifying individual, personal spiritual gifts. On a scale of one to five, participants are asked to rate themselves on the basis of sixty five statements. A



final tally will indicate their specific gifts.

Next, a “*Stewardship Time & Talents Form*” lists various areas for church service where members can apply their spiritual gifts.

## SPIRITUAL GIFTS IDENTIFICATION

[www.selc.lcms.org](http://www.selc.lcms.org) - Stewardship  
Pastoral Helps - “*Spiritual Gifts*”

## Active & Inactive Member Lists

Some congregations, with effective results in reducing membership losses, keep two membership lists: “*active & inactive*”. Members who did not worship or contribute financially for one year are placed on an inactive list. If inactivity extends to two years, inactives are not given offering envelopes but can be resumed upon request. Faithful members, possessing the spiritual gift of sharing the Word, personally visit those inactive in an effort to lovingly reclaim them. An inactive member is never removed from membership unless a request is made in writing. The reason for such “self-excommunication” is placed squarely where it belongs and could prevent a personal law suit.

## Communicate!

Congregations should not be in a hurry to remove inactive members. Keeping in touch via mailed or emailed newsletters is important. Communication tools are the last things to be removed from a church budget.. Jesus was a communicator. Congregations communicating to those within and without the Church will prevent membership losses and insure gains.

## The Great Attraction for Member Retention

“...knit together in love...” (Col. 2:2)