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A STUDY OF THE APPROACH TO DELINQUENT CHURCH MEMBERS

A Thesis Presented to the Faculty of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, Department of Practical Theology in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Bachelor of Divinity

by

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Approved by:

Advisor

Reader

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CHAPTER I

CONSIDERING THE PROBLEM

One of the most difficult and distressing problems that a minister encounters today is that of dealing with delinquent church members. Those members of a congregation who become lax in their faith through neglect of the means of grace or an evident attitude of indifference in their spiritual life constitute a problem that is not easily solved. Speaking of delinquent or inactive church members, W. F. Crossland asserts: "They constitute a challenge to every church and minister and represent one of the major problems facing the Christian Church. "1 The aim of this study, therefore, has been to examine the extent of the problem and consider ways and means which have proven successful in solving the problem. By solving the problem we mean approaching the delinquent in order to rewin him to active membership. has not been the purpose of this study to be concerned with the administration of the final stage of church discipline or excommunication. Rather we have endeavored to determine what can and should be done in order to restore the backsliding, delinquent members to a more fervent faith in the Savior and a more fruitful fellowship with the congregation.

It should be evident that unless the delinquent members

Attendance (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1949), p. 133.

are reactivated, they are in danger of losing their faith completely and forfeiting the salvation of their souls. In view of this possibility, Walter G. Boss declares:

There is nothing more tragic than to see saved sould slip back into the ways and thoughts of the world, to see the souls over which we have labored long and prayed hard fall from the faith.²

But in spite of this danger which may befall the delinquent, and in spite of the apparently widespread extent of the problem of delinquency in church membership, resource material pertinent to the subject is conspicuous by its absence. In our search for such material, we discovered that the card catalog of Pritzlaff Library contained one reference to the subject "Delinquent Members." Even an examination of such related topics as "Backsliding," "Defectives," "Counseling," "Evangelism, " "Faith, " "Membership, " "Members, Inactive, " and others failed to uncover what could be called a very extensive treatment of the problem. The research itself was limited to material in English, and several valuable references were found by a study of the volume indexes of the Concordia Theological Monthly, Today Magazine, and the English references of the Magazin fuer Evangelische Lutherische Homiletik. It is to be regretted that there is no periodical reference for the journals of the Lutheran Church, because it may well be that there has been more written on the subject than we were able to find.

Walter G. Boss, "Reaching, Winning, and Keeping-These Three I", Today, II (November, 1947), 5.

The writer's personal interest in the subject stems from his experience while serving as vicar at one of the largest churches of the Missouri Synod, where the need for some guiding system of dealing with delinquents was particularly noticeable. This study has revealed that there are certain basic methods which may serve as guidelines for a successful approach to delinquent members. Although we realize that this study has not exhausted the subject, yet we feel that the observations which we have made should prove helpful for those who work to rewin delinquents. The fact that a problem exists has been established. The motivations for approaching the delinquent have been presented. A system for rewinning the delinquents has been suggested. But the final effort to reclaim the delinquents depends on the congregations themselves. As J. E. Herrmann has so aptly said:

If a congregation is unwilling to undertake an extended and sustained effort to contact its delinquent members personally it has only itself to blame if the problem grows worse as time goes on. This need not be. This ought not be. This must not be the case.

³J. E. Herrmann, "Suggested Home Visitation Program for Delinquent Members" (Unpublished Stewardship Bulletin by J. E. Herrmann, Stewardship Counselor of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, 210 N. Broadway, St. Louis, Kissouri, issued in 1950), p. 2.

CHAPTER II

DETERMINING THE SITUATION

The Definition of Delinquency

It has been said by more than one of our pastors that one-third of our members are workers, one-third are jerkers, and one-third are shirkers. That statement in itself would indicate that not all members are sharing an equal amount of the work to be done by a congregation. But how can we define delinquency in church membership? We have discovered that it is not an easy thing to find one pat answer to that question. Various authorities have proposed various definitions and descriptions of delinquency, and although one writer may have a broader concept of the term than another, there is a basic agreement among the sources consulted that delinquency is a sinful neglect of the responsibilities which a person assumes when he becomes a member of a congregation. So A. W. Lilly is moved to proclaim:

Not one, or a few, but all, are alike to fill their sphere in the Church of Christ. Membership there is not a mere union for defense and self-satisfaction, but a union for aggressive work and for glorious achievements for Christ: not for ease and ornament but for cross-bearing and self-denials and for the conversion of souls. But what failures! what delinquencies!

¹A. W. Lilly, "What Is the Duty of the Church Toward Her Delinquent Members?", <u>Lutheran Quarterly</u>, VIII (1878), 232.

And Clarence H. Benson voices the same thought when he says:

It is distressing to discover how many persons are lost to the membership in the church, not merely through death or upon defection, but through indifference and neglect. The number often amounts to a startling fraction of the entire enrollment.²

One of the difficulties which hinders us in our search for a definition of delinquency is that different writers use different terms for describing the situation. William Evans, for instance, employs the term backslider, and says:

By the backslider is meant the one who having begun the Christian life, has given it up for one reason or another; the one who, having put his hand to the plough, has turned back.

on the other hand, Crossland speaks of "inactive members" and describes them in these words: "the lost sheep who have gone astray into unchristian paths of religious indifference and even of moral and spiritual danger." That these terms, and consequently also their definitions, have a general, if not a very close, similarity to the term delinquent, seems quite evident, especially when we turn to the definition of delinquency provided by Lilly, who says that it means

the failure of fulfilling the vows of a Christian profession, either by wilful neglect or wilful transgression.

Chicago: Moody Press, c. 1946), p. 55.

William Evans, <u>Personal Soul-Winning</u> (Chicago: The Bible Institute Colportage Association, C.1910), p. 93.

⁴W. F. Crossland, How to Increase Church Membership and Attendance (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1949), p. 133.

Perfect obedience is not claimed, but a faithful and prayerful effort to live right, and a regular and conscientious use of the means of grace. Less than this cannot be accepted, because this much all are able to do.

From what has been daid thus far we might conclude that delinquent members are those who have become indifferent to their need for worship and have been irregular in their attendance at church services. In fact, that is essentially the meaning of the definition presented by V. H. Winter, as he says: "Delinquent members—members that have drifted away from church and are sinning against the Third Command—ment." Benson, whose words would also support this view, does not, however, limit his description to church attendance, for he declares:

There are those who still reside within the parish who have drifted away and have ceased to attend the services of the church. There may even be included those who attend irregularly and take no active part in the work of the church.

The latter reference to a condition of delinquency in the form of personal inactivity emphasizes the fact that there may be other types of delinquency besides that of neglecting the means of grace.

⁵Lilly, op. cit., p. 233.

⁶v. H. Winter, "Dealing With Delinquent Members," Theologische Quartalschrift, XLV (October, 1948), 254.

⁷Benson, op. c1t., p. 56.

Apparently that is the contention of Lilly, who asserts:

Another form of delinquency is personal inactivity. A decent moral life, a formal connection with the Church, and a reputable standing in the community, are deemed necessary; and many think that this is all that is required. . . They are unproductive, add nothing to the Christian character of the Church, and nothing to her working forces. They exert no positive influence for the advancement of the kingdom of God. They preach neither by precept nor example.

Nor is this form of delinquency limited to the older members of the congregation. D. D. Dautenhahn believes that the true size of the problem becomes apparent when younger people who shirk their responsibilities are included, for he contends:

When we think of expanding to include delinquent children, those confirmed but not affirming their faith in life and word, we have a problem which has taxed all the ingenuity and talent of the many leaders and organizations in our Church.

This lack of participation in the work of the Church is often noticed in the financial contributions of the members for works of charity. Again it is Lilly who remarks:

Another deplorable delinquency prevails among church members in the work of beneficence. The cause of God is languishing on account of the close and illiberal spirit that abounds among the professed friends of Christ. The benevolent operations of the Church are seriously embarrassed, and the progress of Christ's kingdom is retarded because of the meagerness of benevolent aid. 10

⁸Lilly, op. cit., p. 234.

⁹D. D. Dautenhahn and A. R. Gallert, "A Program of Expansion" (essay delivered at Texas Pastoral Conference, 1949), p. 1.

¹⁰Lilly, op. cit., p. 235.

Thus we see that delinquency in church membership may take a variety of forms, which, while often originating in a neglect of the means of grace, does not necessarily consist in or even include that particular weakness.

The Universal Existence of Delinquency

The problem of delinquent church members is not one which is peculiar to the mid-twentieth century churches only. Already in 1891 the Rev. Charles E. Hay observed that the "unparalleled advance of the church in numerical strength and popularity" was often attended by a form of delinquency. which he described as "a growing disposition to neglect the table of the Lord. "Il Certainly the history of the Gospel in the past two thousand years would have shown many more souls led to Christ and many more souls kept for the Savior if there had not been so many delinquents. The observation of Lilly seems completely valid, then, when he says: "This delinquency is not peculiar to this age, or any other age of the Church. Ever since the days of Cain, the Church of God has been afflicted with delinquency and backsliding and apostasy. "12

Obarles E. Hay, "Status and Treatment of the Non-Communing Adult Member," Lutheran Quarterly, XXI (1891), 552.

¹²Lilly, op. oit., p. 232.

Nor is the problem peculiar to the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod. A. C. Archibald announces:

A study of the statistics from all major denominations for the past twenty years reveals that nearly 40 per cent of our evangelistic recruits are lost to the church within seven years of their reception.13

Although we may wonder just what he means by "evangelistic recruits," his recognition of the losses to church membership does not stand alone. Benson discusses the problem of delinquency or inactive church members, and refers to the book Know Your Local Church, whose author, Bert Wilson, evaluates the efficiency of a church home by a simple three-fold test of worship, work, and contributions. Says Benson of Mr. Wilson's system:

By this formula, he evaluates the efficiency of a church where three-fourths of the members attend regularly, one-half contribute systematically, and one fourth are engaged in some activity as follows:

	Eff	loiency	ency	
1.	Worship	75%		Loss 25%
	Giving	50%		50%
3.	Work	75% 50% 25%		50% 75%

Such a church is only 33 1/3 per cent efficient. 14

Testing the efficiency of a congregation is something which
is difficult to gauge accurately, and yet we must admit that
it is another method of illustrating the problem of delinquency. Under an article entitled "Soul Rewinning," the

¹³A. C. Archibald, Establishing the Converts (Philadel-phia: Judson Press, 1952), p. 13.

¹⁴Benson, op cit., p. 56.

Evangelistic Cyclopedia notes: "It is doubtful that our churches are over fifty per cent. efficient. Are they that? In the matter of attendance alone, are our members fifty per cent. regular?" 15

No one can deny the fact that the congregations of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod are also plagued by the problem of delinquents. W. H. Hillmer, commenting on a lecture tour which he made in 1949 for the promotion of evangelism, states that he received repeated questions about possibilities for work among the inactive or delinquent members. The frequency of such requests caused him to draw two conclusions:

1. Perhaps the problem of delinquent members is much more general than we surmise; and 2. it is encouraging that our lay people and pastors are giving serious thought to this problem. 16

While the statistics of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod do not include an account of delinquent members, the fact is that many delinquents become so inactive that they eventually are lost to the church, and a study of the statistics under the heading "defections" may therefore prove helpful in leading us to an understanding of the reality of the problem. By studying the statistical reports of the Missouri Synod from

^{15&}quot;Soul Rewinning, The Evangelistic Cyclopedia, edited by G. B. F. Hallock (New York: George H. Doran Company, 1922), p. 222.

¹⁶w. H. Hillmer, "Proposing a Program of Internal Evangelism," Today, V (November, 1950), 13.

1920 through 1924, R. Jesse observed that although during that period 136,611 people became members through the rite of confirmation, and there were 63,273 burials recorded, there was only a net gain of 35,548, leaving a figure of 37,790 as a minimum loss. 17 E. C. Kieninger also demonstrates losses to the church by quoting the statistics of more recent years. In 1944, for example, about 25,000 members were gained, but 14,000, more than half as many as were gained, were lost by "a mysterious process of evaporation. *18 Statistics for the , year 1952 show that there were 46,517 accessions from without, but a total of 20,725 in defections, leaving a total gain from without, in excess of defections, of only 25,792. 19

These figures could be misleading, because "defections" is defined in the form for the 1953 Parochial Report as

all others removed from roster of communicants (by joining other Lutheran Synods, other churches, by moving away without a transfer and no longer considered members, be severing own connection, by excommunication, etc.).

¹⁷R. Jesse, "Stopping The Leak," Magazin fuer Evangelischen Lutherischen Homiletik, L (1926), 225.

¹⁸ E. C. Kieninger, "Stop Those Leaks!" Today, I (November, 1946), 9.

of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod for the Year 1952. (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1953), p. 157.

²⁰ Parochial Report, January 1 to December 31, 1953. (Published by the BUREAU OF STATISTICS, 210 N. Broadway, St. Louis 2, Missouri), p. 1.

Nevertheless, the fact that delinquent members may sooner or later remove themselves or else be excommunicated from the fellowship of the congregation, and the fact that these statistics point to a very disturbing leak in our church membership, lead us to conclude that these statistics do give some indication of the very serious problem which dealing with delinquent members presents to us. Furthermore, although Hillmer points out that it is difficult to determine the extent of delinquency in our churches because it is hard to measure inadtivity, still he admits that it has been common to hear such expressions as:

"In our church one third of the members are inactive."
"We have many members who come to church and Communion just often enough so you cannot excommunicate them."
"If only we could count on a majority of our members!"
"It's always the same faithful few. "21

Consequently Hillmer declares: "We come to the conclusion that the problem of delinquent members is one which is real and which we ought to face squarely and fearlessly." 22

The Evidence to Determine Delinquency

In order to face the problem, there must be some means of analyzing the situation. Although we cannot measure delinquency accurately, we must be able to find out who is

²¹W. H. Hillmer, "Proposing a Program of Internal Evangelism," Today, V (November, 1950), 13.

²² Ibid.

delinquent if we are to restore these slipping members. E.

G. Johnson, a layman, believes that the inadequacy of records
is the underlying cause of much of the difficulty in making
progress on the delinquent problem. In speaking of the experience of his own congregation, he comments:

We could not quickly ascertain how many delinquents we had; nor could we tell promptly how often any one delinquent had been visited or what reactions had been secured. If successive visits had been made by different persons, there was no certainty of any continuity in the handling of the case. 23

W. S. Avery is also of the opinion that a system of keeping track of the delinquents be employed, for he suggests:

Perhaps a special "inactive membership roll" should be kept as a "responsibility list." . . . After all, a God who watches over every sparrow's fall must be just as concerned over the soul of someone lost from the church as he is with someone who has never been a church member. Sprely he is concerned with the loss as well as the lost;24

The Evengelistic Cyclopedia stresses this need, too, and indicates that records may be used to advantage in learning the names of those who need special attention, for it states:

We suggest that each pastor make a list of his members in good standing; we mean those who are in attendance, who support the church, and who take part in the work. We suggest that another list be made of those who are delinquent—Slackers. Then let the emphasis for the

²³E. G. Johnson, "A Layman's Views on Dealing With Delinquents." (Unpublished paper read before a Lutheran Pastoral Conference at Trinity Lutheran Church, Alton, Illinois), p. 2.

²⁴ W. S. Avery, You Shall Be My Witnesses (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1948), p. 126.

present season be placed upon the reaching of these, the securing of their enlistment, the incorporation of them into the efficient body of the church. 25

Bus records must be complete and up to date if they are to be of any real value. One reason for this is that the sooner a delinquency is discovered and treatment is begun, the better are the chances of rewinning the backslider. So deorge E. Sweazey maintains that "a roll must be reviewed at fairly frequent intervals if trouble is to be discovered in the early stages. There needs to be a schedule for this. "26 Avery not only mentions the need for frequent analyses of the membership records, but even supplies us with a commendable series of checking points when he declares:

It is almost imperative that a congregation make regular analyses of its membership. One congregation used to check each member periodically upon five points: attending worship services, receiving the Lord's Supper, supporting the local church financially, giving to the benevolence of the church-at-large, and co-operating in Christian service. Although there is no way to measure a person's spirituality accurately, these five items gave indication of how each member was responding to his church obligations. 27

For those members who are known to be delinquent, it is extremely helpful if their individual records can be kept up-to-date. Johnson, who already hinted at the need for

^{25&}quot;Soul Rewinning", op. cit., p. 222.

Work in the World (New York: Harper and Brothers, c.1953), p. 246.

²⁷Avery, op. cit., p. 95.

such a system, mentions that a separate file was started for each delinquent member in his congregation. He explains this by saying:

Each file contained first of all a statement of what constituted the person's delinquency. This was supplemented with any further information which could be recalled concerning past dealings with the individual. 28

A visitation report for every succeeding call was added to the file to keep the information pertinent and fresh.

Thus we have seen that it is possible to recognize the existence of the problem, and even to be alert for signs of its development through certain outward indications and records. In spite of the fact that the problem is one which is not peculiar to our age, or limited to the membership of the Lutheran Church, it is a problem which we must face squarely. To find the motivation for facing the problem, we move on to the next chapter.

The Te la print, ion with that should be, who come

²⁸ Johnson, op. cit., p. 3.

CHAPTER III

FINDING THE PROPER MOTIVATION

That We Might Save the Lost

It has already been established that the basic purpose of working with delinquents, at least insofar as this study is concerned, is to rewin them to Christ and prevent their being eternally lost. It should not seem unusual that a concern for the eternal welfare of the souls of delinquent members should also be one of the basic motivations which ought to prompt us to endeavor to solve the problem. In fact, in most cases of any activity, the purpose will often supply motivation as well.

As we have previously noted, delinquent members are in danger of falling completely from faith. Lilly points us to the motivation which we can find in that fact when he says:

Delinquent members are not to be left to themselves, but they are to be restored. . . . In this state of error they are in extreme danger of being lost. And because of their errors and neglects all the sympathetic agencies of the Church should be called into requisition for their restoration.

In a similar vein, W. H. Bouman asserts:

This is the point, the end, that should be, and ever remain, the end of all disciplinary action, to gain the brother, to gain him who is walking the way to perdition,

¹A. W. Lilly, "What is the Duty of the Church Toward Her Delinquent Members?", <u>Lutheran Quarterly</u>, VIII (1878), 242.

who stands in danger of being eternally lost.²
The purpose and motivation, of course, will determine the course of action which we pursue. Thus, in answer to a question concerning the proper procedure for dealing with members who have "neglected divine services, the lord's Supper, and Christian giving for two years," Dr. Theodore Graebner says:

It is very well that the minister or his board go through the list once every year and check those who have not been heard of for two years, but in every case an effort must be made to deal with these folks before they are dropped from the roll. After all, our object must belto save people, not to have a clean congregation.

The fact that God Himself is long-suffering and abundant in mercy, continuously seeking to regain those who tend to turn away from Him, becomes the point of Lilly's argument when he contends:

Delinquents need encouragement. They are estranged from their duty and proper relation to Christ. They feel that they are sinners and aliens, but they must remember that they have a great Savior. . . They are not hopeless culprits, but wanderers from God and on the road to ruin. To them God says, "As I live, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live."

²Walter H. Bouman, "The Practical Application of Matthew 18:15-18, " Goncordia Theological Monthly, XVIII (1947), 187.

³Theodore Graebner, "Explorations in the Field of Bible Study," The Walther League Messenger, L (January, 1942), 290.

⁴Lilly, loc. cit.

The Evangelistic Cyclopedia also employs the possibility of a shameful end for the delinquent as a motivation for action when it maintains:

Let us see that the delinquent are called upon, repeatedly called upon, rounded up for the Army of Christ. "Killed in action is a coveted crown." But "Killed in inaction" is a tramp's doom—yes, a religious tramp's doom, and a religious slacker's doom.

At the same time, the motivation for preventing the eternal loss of delinquent members includes the purpose of winning them to a fruitful faith, as J. E. Herrmann indicates when he suggests that the goal of working with delinquents is "reclaiming them for Christ and for Christian service."

That We Might Be Faithful Shepherds

Another source of motivation, closely related to that of saving the delinquents from eternal perdition, is that of fulfilling our pastoral responsibility. As a shepherd of the flock, the pastor must always be concerned about the sheep who tend to wander away from the safety of the fold. With this in mind, Winter avers:

^{5&}quot;Soul Rewinning," The Evangelistic Cyclopedia, edited by G. B. F. Hallock (New York: George H. Doran Company, 1922), p. 422.

⁶J. E. Herrmann, "Suggested Home Visitation Program for Delinquent Members," (Unpublished Stewardship Bulletin by J. E. Herrmann, Stewardship Counselor of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, St. Louis, Missouri, issued in 1950), p. 1.

A pastor is a shepherd. And his members are entrusted to his care. Surely there is a tie between the shepherd and his sheep. And when either shepherd or sheep go astray the other will be affected.

Tending the flock implies not only feeding it, but preserving it from all danger. Boss uses the term "keeping" in the sense of "preserving" when he says that "soul keeping is in a sense the real objective of all pastoral work in a congregation. "8 Of the many Bible passages which speak to us of our responsibility to warn and admonish the wayward souls, one of the most striking is that found in Exek. 3:17-21:

Son of man, I have made thee a watchman unto the house of Israel: therefore hear the word at my mouth, and give them warning from me. When I say unto the wicked, Thou shalt surely die; and thou givest him not warning, nor speakest to warn the wicked from his wicked way, to save his life; the same wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at thine hand. Yet if thou warn the wicked, and he turn not from his wickedness, nor from his wicked way, he shall die in his iniquity; but thou hast delivered thy soul. Again, When a righteous man doth turn from his righteousness, and commit iniquity, and I lay a stumblingblock before him, he shall die; because thou hast not given him warning, he shall die in his sin, and his righteousness which he hath done shall not be remembered; but his blood will I require at thine hand. Nevertheless if thou warn the righteous man, that the righteous sin not, he shall surely live, because he is warned; also thou hast delivered thy soul.?

⁷V. H. Winter, "Dealing With Delinquent Members."

Theologische Quartalschrift, XLV (October, 1948), 254.

⁸Walter G. Boss, "Reaching, Winning, and Keeping-These Three!" <u>Today</u>, II (November, 1947), 5.

⁹Holy Bible, Authorized Version.

The task of searching for the wayward is not an easy one, but it is one which every faithful shepherd must undertake, as Arthur W. Hewitt reminds us:

Certainly we are not shepherds at all unless we are faithful personal evangelists. The lost sheep-man, woman, child-must be sought by the pastor suntil he finds it. There will be heartache in the quest, of course.

"But none of the ransomed ever knew

How deep were the waters crossed;

Nor how dark was the night the Lord passed through

Ere he found his sheep that was lost. "10

The close relationship of the motivation of saving the lost and being faithful pastors is again stressed by Winter, who states:

Our Savior went after the lost to save them. There is the purpose why He wants every shepherd in His Church to pursue him who errs. And the erring brother must know that his pastor is seeking not his punishment but his salvation. II

Surely, then, the desire to be a faithful paster should be an impelling motivation that prompts us to seek to rewin the delinquent.

That We Might Fulfill the Responsibility of the Church

Just as it is the responsibility of the pastor to save those who begin to stray, so the entire congregation has a

¹⁰ Arthur Wentworth Hewitt, Highland Shepherds (Chicago: Willett, Clark and Company, 1939), p. 214.

¹¹ Winter, op. cit., p. 258.

responsibility towards its members, and the desire to save
the wayward should be the desire of all. And in that desire
to fulfill our responsibilities as a congregation we may also
find the motivation for approaching the delinquent. If any
doubt exists concerning the responsibility of the church or
congregation to the backslider, it would be unfounded according to Lilly. He himself proposes a question regarding the
relation the Church bears toward delinquents, and answers it
by saying:

The Church still holds a protective relation toward them. They hold a nominal connection, they are not dismissed from their allegiance, nor absolved from their accountability; but they are out of their proper and obedient relation, and have put themselves in an attitude which demands the prompt attentions of the Church.

In like manner Avery affirms that "the truly evangelistic church will constantly be on the alert to prevent its members from becoming delinquent and to win them back if they do become inactive. "13 This must be the case, because all Christians have a unique fellowship with one another as members of the Body of Christ, and as members of a local congregation they should have a particular concern for one another. Lully makes a beautiful reference to this fellowship by saying:

¹²Lilly, op. cit., p. 237.

¹³w. S. Avery, You Shall Be My Witnesses (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1948), p. 126.

The strong and sacred ties, that bind members of a Christian congregation in one, should prompt the same deep and abiding anxiety in the heart of all when one goes astray. The inconsistency and unworthiness of one member of a Church should awaken the deepest feelings of concern in all the rest, and rouse up all in the effort to reform and restore for the sake of the delinquent and for the sake of the Church. It

The responsibility which the church bears to the delinquent members is stressed repeatedly in the Holy Scriptures.

The words of Jesus, for example, as found in Matt. 18:15-17, remind of this in the statement:

Moreoever, if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he neglect to hear them, tell it to the church; but if he neglect to hear the church, then let him be unto thee as an heathen men and a publican.

Another exhortation is found in Gal. 6:1, "Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted." In 1 Thess. 5:14, St. Paul writes, "Now we exhort you, brethren, warn them that are unruly." And in James 5:20 we read, "Let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins."

All these and many other passages from the Bible constitute

¹⁴L111y, op. cit., p. 240.

¹⁵Holy Bible. Authorized Version.

an undeniable testimony to the responsibility which the church has in the work of rewinning the delinquent.

Carefully observed by some congregations. But simply removing delinquent members from the rolls without carefully seeking to rewin them neither fulfills nor obviates the duty which the congregation has toward its delinquents. Sidney Powell emphasizes that fact when he observes: "It is so easy to drop people from the roll. What happened to them? We don't know; they just left. But it is our business to know."16 We begin to realize the importance of this responsibility of the congregation when we remember that unless the pastor and the rest of the members seek to rewin the delinquent, chances are that no one else will. Because of that, Lilly remarks:

and the Church must do it. The world will not. No reforming influences come thence. The Church must win the absentees back to their places: the neglecter of the Lord's Supper to its observance—the cold and careless to activity—the worldly minded and illiberal to the practice of giving: and the outward offenders to repentance and reformation. This is the work of the Church, not of the world. 17

Thus we should also find the motivation for approaching the

¹⁶ Sidney Powell, Where Are The People? (Nashville: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1942), p. 144.

¹⁷Lilly, op. cit., p. 241.

delinquents in a desire to fulfill the responsibility of the church and the fellowship which church membership implies.

The Fact That Many Can Be Rewon

We would not be speaking the truth if we were to say that dealing with delinquents is easy work. Winter makes the difficulties connected with the task very evident when he declares:

Dealing with delinquent members is not always a pleasant task. . . . when it comes to calling on a delinquent member, one who has heard the Gospel for years and has become satisted with it and has become a backslider and manifests no interest for the Word and no love for the preacher, to whom churchgoing seems the greatest bore and misery in his life and the preacher the last person he seems to love and care to hear, there our flesh winces and hesitates, and thinks twice and will postpone and postpone . . . It seems a job to enter a home where you feel certain you're not wanted. 18

Although not all delinquents could be listed as hopeless cases, we must also admit that there are many who simply refuse to return. But it would be a sad thing if we would permit that fact to keep us from trying to rewin them. That such, however, sometimes seems to be the case, we note from the words of Lilly, who states:

True it is that there are many incorrigible delinquents, who seem beyond the reach of any influence for good. It is sad how many defy all efforts, and it is equally sad how many Churches never put forth any effort to reclaim the erring. 19

¹⁸ Winter, op. cit., pp. 254f.

¹⁹Lilly, loc. cit.

In view of the difficulty which we often experience in dealing with delinquents, many people find little or no motivation for the work in the possibility of being successful. Generally, they would rather seek the unchurched. So we see that Sweazy claims:

The problem is so grievous not only because it is so large but because it is so difficult. Second try evangelism is the hardest sort. It is much easier to win a new member to the Church than to rewin an old one. 20

On the other hand, Archibald admits that it is difficult, but he insists that the work can be successful too, for he says:

These cases are difficult. It has become proverbial that it is easier to win a convert than to restore a backslider. But the fact remains that lapsed members can be restored. The church that will patiently, prayerfully, and sacrificially give itself to this endeavor, will behold marvelous recoveries.

No one likes to attempt to do something if he thinks it is impossible to have any success in the effort. But there is a challenge in doing something difficult if there is a fair possibility of reaping some fruits for the labor involved.

And the fact that many delinquents can be rewon should be a

Work in the World (New York: Harper and Brothers, c.1953), p. 244.

²¹A. C. Archibald, Establishing the Converts (Philadel-phia: Judson Press, 1952), p. 99.

strong motivation to urge us to try to rewin them. As evidence of the fact that many delinquents can be reactivated, Crossland asserts:

The fact that the majority of them can be rewon to the Christian way of living through a church loyalty crusade has been proved by the experience of thousands of churches. Teams of trained laymen, calling in the homes of absentee church members and talking with them about their duty to Christ and church, have invariably had amazing success in re-establishing their inactive fellow members in their church. 22

Thus we see that there is abundant motivation to arouse us to action. But if we are to act with efficiency, we need to prepare carefully for this difficult but necessary work.

To guide us in such preparation, we turn to the next chapter.

Attendance (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1949), p. 133.

CHAPTER IV

PREPARING FOR THE ATTACK

Listing the Causes

Delinquency in church membership is often the result of one or more complications in the spiritual life of the individual who is the object of our concern. Basic to the work of approaching the delinquent, therefore, is a knowledge of the causes which have produced the unhealthy situation. One of the first contributing factors listed as a cause of delinquency lies in the congregation itself. It is the failure of the congregation to do its full duty to the wayward, a fact which Herrmann expresses in these words:

Congregations condemning delinquent members because they are not doing their full duty to the church had better first ask whether they have done their full duty to such members.1

Discussing the fact that many are lost to active church membership, Boss declares:

That it does happen, we cannot deny. It is but another sign of Satan's intense activity and, we admit with

lJ. E. Herrmann, "Suggested Home Visitation Program for Delinquent Members," (Unpublished Stewardship Bulletin by J. E. Herrmann, Stewardship Counselor of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, St. Louis, Missouri, issued in 1950), p. 2.

heavy heart, frequently of our own lethargy, carelessness, and indifference.2

Another cause for delinquency, also connected with the congregation, is the attitude of the members towards one another. According to Lilly, "the great majority of delinquents have become so by being neglected or unrecognized by their fellow-members." Powell suggests somewhat the same idea when he says: "It may be our fault and not theirs. . . . Rather than place the blame upon the inactive members, let us endeavor to see wherein we have failed." The spirit of exclusiveness and lack of sympathy which characterizes some of our members is another cause of delinquency to be found in the congregation itself. So Lilly asserts:

The unchristian and unreasonable clannishness in congregations has driven many an humble and faithful member away from fellowship and interest in the church. This wrong lies at the door of the church, and calls for the speedy return to Christian sympathy and cordial Church love. 5

Sad to say, the past or present pastor of the congregation may be responsible to some extent for the delinquency of a

Walter G. Boss, "Reaching, Winning, and Keeping-These Three!" Today, II (November, 1947), 5.

³A. W. Lilly, "What Is the Duty of the Church Toward Her Delinquent Nembers?", Lutheran Quarterly, VIII (1878), 241.

Asidney Powell, Where Are the People? (Nashville: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1942), p. 145.

Shilly, loc. cit.

member. This is the belief of Winter, who reasons that "where there is a delinquent member, there may be a delinquent pastor. And where there is a delinquent pastor, there may be a host of delinquent members. 6 The statement of Lawson F. Knight agrees with this, for he says:

Arguments or misunderstandings with a former pastor are often given as a reason for neglecting church. While it should be a basic supposition that most of our clergy, past and present, have used Christian principles and common sense in dealing with members, and while the brethren are certainly entitled to the charity which the Eighth Commandment requires in defending them, speaking well of them, and putting the best construction on everything, it must be admitted nevertheless that mistaken judgments, taotless dealings, legalistic approaches, and plain misunderstandings are possible.

One of the causes which Kieninger mentions in regard to loss in membership is poor preaching. If pastors grow slovenly in their sermon work, Kieninger declares that "our congregations will be quick to detest a lack of thoroughness in this respect, and leaks in membership are sure to follow." He even goes so far as to say that the personal appearance of the pastor can be a means to draw people to our church or drive them away, and he adds that "a well-groomed, neat

⁶v. H. Winter, "Dealing With Delinquent Members," Theologische Quartalschrift, XLV (October, 1948), 254.

⁷Lawson F. Knight, "Claiming and Reclaiming," Today, I (December, 1946), 29.

⁸E. C. Kieninger, "Stop Those Leaks!", Today, I (November, 1946), 10.

and clean appearance is to be expected of every pastor. "9

Condition in the life of the wayward member himself, too.

In his spiritual life, for example, some have proposed that he may never really have come to faith. So in searching for causes of delinquency, Hillmer quotes Evans from his book,

Personal Soul-Winning: "not all professing backeliders are so in reality. Some backeliders have never really slid forward." On this Hillmer comments: "Evans would say that often church delinquency is due to the fact that conversion never took place. "10 But Hillmer continues by saying that more often it seems that the cause of backeliding is a weak faith. He explains that "a person with a weak faith is easily 'offended' or discouraged and frequently gravitates toward the perimeter of the membership when things in the congregation do not go his way. "11

Delinquency caused by weak faith may include two significant characteristics, which Hillmer describes in these words:

As a rule, the weak brother does not see the relation of faith to life; and he does not see the Christian life as a process of spiritual growth. In trying to maintain

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰W. H. Hillmer, "Proposing a Program of Internal Evangelism," Today, V (November, 1950), 13f.

¹¹ Ibid., 14.

a static Christianity, he unconsciously begins to retrogress both in faith and life.12

Mr. Johnson asserts that it is true that delinquency in church members may often result from their failure to reflect the religion of Christ in practical everyday living, but he contends that this weakness may stem from an unbalanced Christian training which emphasized justification but minimized sanotification. Speaking of delinquents, he maintains that

with so many of them religion is a thing of tomorrowof the hereafter--a body of lofty ideals and fine
truths, acknowledged and even accepted, --but somehow
unrelated to working, or playing, or any other act of
daily living. God gets a nod of recognition in the
church, but the fact that He is in the maching-shop, or
the theatre, or the store is often unrecognized. 13

Even a strong faith needs constant nourishment through the means of grace, and so it should not be a surprise to learn that those who have a weak faith frequently begin to falter even more if it becomes difficult for them to attend church services. The fact that many people are constantly changing their place of residence is therefore another contributing factor to the cause of delinquency. That this is the claim of Enight we see from his statement that

¹² Tb1d.

¹³E. G. Johnson, "A Layman's View on Dealing with Delinquents," (Unpublished paper read before a Lutheran Pastoral Conference at Trinity Lutheran Church, Alton, Illinois), p. 10.

moving into a different community where the Lutheran Church is not represented, or failure to secure a transfer to the congregation in the new neighborhood, also produces drifting, backsliding Lutherans. Many people simply . . . will begin to drift as soon as they move a distance from the church. 14

Hillmer also recognizes this cause of delinquency in the nomadic life of our people when he says: "The <u>diaspora</u> of the past decade has resulted in much driftwood and much deadwood. "15

The breakdown of the spiritual atmosphere of the home is another unfortunate condition which has contributed to the development of delinquent members. Jesse discusses this truth when he remarks:

Defection, backsliding from the faith, would not be so common if the spirituality of the home were preserved and stimulated more . . . our losses, in their majority, are traced back to homes in which the dealine of home religion has been marked. 16

In some cases at least, the decline of religion in the home has been the result of mixed marriages, and while marriages do furnish the occasion for bringing many adult converts into the church, the final result is not always so God-pleasing.

Ronald W. Goetsch tells us that

¹⁴knight, op. cit., p. 30.

¹⁵Hillmer, op. cit., p. 14.

¹⁶R. Jesse, "Stopping The Leak," Magazin fuer Evangelische Lutherische Homiletik, L (1926), 228.

often a mixed marriage results in the loss of the true faith for the one party involved, again in indifference to religion by either or both of the parties, and very often in a total disregard of all religion. 17

Closely allied to and often including the home atmosphere, the general environment in which a person lives and works and plays may also tend to be a cause of delinquency. Hillmer takes this point into consideration when he says:

Some of our members, either because of the company they keep or because of their home surroundings, live in an environment which is not at all conducive to a deepening of spiritual life or to active church membership.

That worldliness and outside influences in one's environment contribute much to the loss of faithful church members is also the opinion of Jesse, who asserts:

The lodge takes its toll; evil companions corrupt good manners. Ungodly educators and unwholesome literature undermine the faith of our youth. Men are absorbed in business affairs and weaned from the main business of life. Young people, like Demas, learn to love the world and contract mixed marriages, which result from indifference or at least breed indifference as time goes on. 19

In summary, among the basic reasons for loss of interest and delinquency in church members, we have a list which Crossland supplies. Including some of those already mentioned, he notes

¹⁷Ronald W. Goetsch, "To What Extent May and Must Action Be Taken in the Case of Nixed Marriages," <u>Concordia Theological Monthly</u>, XIV (April, 1943), 247.

¹⁸Hillmer, op. cit., p. 14.

¹⁹ Jesse, op. cit., p. 226.

that delinquency is caused by

the letting down of personal standards and ideals, inadequate training in church membership and Christian habits, lack of pastoral care, unchristian habits, physical disability, and carelessness.20

Knowing what some of the causes for the problem may be, we shall be better prepared to apply the proper treatment.

Individual Diagnosis Is Necessary

But knowing the general causes for delinquency will not benefit us very much unless we know the particular causes for each individual case. Thus, a necessary part of preparation for the approach to delinquents is a careful analysis of each case. Hillmer informs us that this is so as he states:

With this problem, as with others, the proper diagnosis is of utmost importance. If we are going to do something about the delinquent member, we should first see what causes him to become delinquent.21

Doing this will help us to understand the backslider and so enable us to deal with him more effectively. Mr. Johnson affirms that "every delinquent case must be dealt with in the light of the special circumstances that surround it and with full recognition of the limitations of the person involved."22

Attendance (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1949), p. 139.

²¹ Hillmer, op. cit., p. 13.

²² Johnson, op. cit., p. 8.

We must remember, too, that the delinquent may be in need of sympathy and encouragement. Archibald agrees with what has been said, for he himself states;

The first step, therefore, in the recovery of those who have lapsed in the matter of attending public worship is to acquaint ourselves with the conditions surrounding each case. This is necessary, if we are to judge fairly and to approach each individual with an open mind and a kindly heart. . . . When we have made such a close investigation of the circumstances surrounding our lapsed members, we may discover to our joy that many of them have not lapsed at all. Instead of judgment, they likely have needed the sympathetic help of their church. 23

The need for such careful diagnosis for each case should be evident from the fact that unless the cause can be removed or overcome, we shall have little hope of rewinning the delinquent. So Evans declares the importance of ascertaining the cause of backsliding, and points out that the very thing which brought about a person's delinquent condition may be what is keeping him from coming back now. "Unless you find out the cause, you cannot deal with the case effectually." 24 Although many reasons may be suggested, we must always seek to determine what has been the true cause of the delinquency. Archibald gives us good advice when he asks:

Was it because of domestic difficulties? Was it due to outside influences, such as worldly associations? Was

²³A. C. Archibald, Establishing the Converts (Philadel-phia: Judson Press, 1952), p. 101.

²⁴William Evans, Personal Soul-Winning (Chicago: The Bible Institute Colportage Association, c.1910), p. 94.

it due to bad habits—drink, gambling, or losse morals? Seek to discover the real reason for the lapse. When your recovery organization moves into action, its work will be effective only to the extent that information of this sort is available. 25

Having made such a diagnosis, we shall be able to classify the delinquent, and perhaps make a distinction in certain cases as to the type of person or type of backsliding with which we are dealing. Crossland believes that it is necessary to make such distinctions, especially between the temporarily inactive and the permanently inactive members. He explains this distinction when he says: "The loneliness because of bereavement, personal illness, babies to care for, and overtime employment are types of the former. Old age, invalidism, and deafness represent the latter." 26

Personal Faith Is Necessary

The personal fiath of those who seek to rewin delinquent church members is something which might well be taken for granted. But as soon as we begin to take something for granted, the danger arises that we may forget about some very obvious but still very essential features of the proper preparation for successful work with the backsliders. How well we meet these wayward members and help them to return to an active faith in the Savier may depend to no small

²⁵ Archibald, op. cit., p. 102.

²⁶ Grossland, loc. cit.

extent on how well we ourselves have first met God. We may
be experts in tact, and know all the answers, but if we are
not guided by faith, the success of our work is questionable.
Evans emphasizes this truth by reminding us that

contact in tact put into practice. . . There are two things to remember about contact: first, we must have contact with God; second, we must have contact with men. We must be heart-foremost with God if we would be head-foremost with men. 27

And one of the activities of our faith which we must never take for granted in dealing with delinquents is that of prayer. Schumacher proclaims: "Until you have prayed, little can be done. Make it a matter of prayer, and God will provide the opportunity and open the door." 28 In a similar way, Torrey stresses the importance of prayer as the key to success in seeking to win souls for Christ. The Christian worker should ask God to direct him to the right persons, to guide him in what he should say, to add His power to what is said, and to carry on after the worker's contact has ended. 29

As the basis of our faith is the Bible, so a good working knowledge of the Scriptures as the only true norm of faith will also be a necessary part of thorough preparation for

²⁷ Evans, op. cit., p. 23.

²⁸John Schumacher, "Each One Reach One--Bible Topic Study," Today, II (November, 1947), 20.

²⁹R. A. Torrey, How to Bring Men to Christ (Chicago: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1893), pp. 11f.

approaching the delinquent. It is knowledge of the word of God that gives our own faith conviction, and it is knowledge of the Scriptures which will help us to rewin the backblider. Dornfield expresses that thought as he asserts:

To reach the lost for Christ must be our consuming passion until He comes again. And to become more and more proficient in doing so must be the prayer and purpose of every Christian, particularly of every Christian pastor. . . . The first requirement for success in soul winning is Bible study. 30

Of course, our knowledge and use of the Scriptures must be based on and supported by our faith in their efficient power. Titus Lang maintains that

we must have faith in the power of the Word of God, by which alone souls are saved, and not only rely on human reason or "cogent arguments." Techniques and strategy serve only to find the right approach.

Simultaneous to our growth in grace and strengthening of faith through the means of grace, there should be growth of love and concern for the wayward brother. This increase in love will also come through our study of the Scriptures and use of the Sacrament, and thus be an important feature in our preparation for the approach.

With these thoughts in mind, we have an awareness of the complexity of the problem because of the multitude of causes. We know that preparation is necessary, preparation

³⁰A. G. Dornfield, "Your Bible-And Your Personal Witness," Today, VI (October, 1951), 5.

³¹ Titus Lang, "Case Histories in Individual Soul Winning," Today, V (September, 1950), 15.

that includes not only a careful diagnosis of each individual case, but also a faith founded on Scripture. But preparation for the approach does little good unless we make use of it by "going into action."

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CHAPTER V

GOING INTO ACTION

Prompt Action Is Needed

When a physician learns that someone is ill and is in need of his services, he does not hesitate to respond, but hastens to offer treatment. Having diagnosed the malady, he does not relax and do nothing more about it, but he proceeds to apply the proper remedy. And he does this without delay, knowing that the sooner he is able to administer the medicine, the more effective it will be in counteracting the ailment. It is not difficult for us to see the parallel which Sweazy draws in speaking of the treatment for spiritual illness, for he makes it very clear that

church sickness is one of those diseases which may be healed if it is caught soon enough, but with delay it tends to become incurable. Many churches get discouraged about their attempts to rewin their lapsing members because they never start the remedies until it is too late. I

Although the work may be difficult and our human nature tempts us to avoid it, Hillmer reminds us that "whatever the causes may be, we shall have to face the problem and determine, God helping us, to take remedial action."

Nork in the World (New York: Harper and Brothers, 0.1953).

²W. H. Hillmer, *Proposing a Program of Internal Evangelism, * <u>Today</u>, V (November, 1950), 14.

The need for prompt action is something which the Bible stresses, too, as Winter points out when he says:

Jesus also said: "Go and tell him!" Literally that word says, "Go up!" Go up to his house, or where you will find him. Often that word has the meaning of the German "Auf!" Here is no sitting still and doing nothing about it. Up and tell him his fault!

Going Into Action Through the Mails

One of the simplest and yet by no means inefficient ways of going into action is that of contacting the backslider by means of a personal letter. It is at least one method of informing the delinquent that you are concerned about him.

So Kieninger advises;

Whenever a member begins to slip, show him that you have noticed his repeated absence and that you are solicitous for his welfare. A friendly personal letter will do much to keep the ties intect.

Some people might argue that the use of the mails has more disadvantages than it has advantages. But Mr. Johnson advances several good reasons why the mails should be used as one of the means at our disposal in working with delinquents. Describing the system employed by his congregation, he tells us that a personal letter is used as the opening wedge in a campaign to regain the delinquent, and he supports this practice by stating that it is "a direct, and sure, and prompt

Jv. H. Winter, "Dealing with Delinquent Members,"

Theologische Guartalschrift, XLV (October, 1948), 259.

4E. C. Kieninger, "Stop Those Leaks!" Today, I

(November, 1946), II.

means of reaching the delinquent," and also eliminates fruitless calls "on an empty house or absent delinquent." It can
be worded to fit the circumstances and the person involved,
and at the same time a carbon copy may be retained as an
exact record of what has been said. Furthermore, he points
out that it avoids the possibilities of personalities and
pleasantries coming into play and minimizing the real issue.5
Dautenbahn has also suggested making use of the mails, but he
continues by proposing another method of contact, saying:
"A program designed to reach the delinquent can certainly
use publicity in the newspaper and on the radio. Each article
and 'ad.' is sure to alert some quiescent conscience."

Going into Action through Personal Contacts

The use of the mails, advertisements in the newspaper and on the radio, and certain other methods do have their place in the approach to the delinquent. But these methods can never replace the personal contact. They are helpful to a certain extent, but in the final analysis, they are only supplementary. The most important and most effective means for going into action is the personal contact. In

⁵E. G. Johnson, "A Layman's Views on Dealing With Delinquents." (Unpublished paper read before a Lutheran Pastoral Conference at Trinity Lutheran Church, Alton, Illinois), pp. 4r.

⁶D. D. Dautenhahn and A. R. Gallert, "A Program of Expansion," (Essay delivered at Texas Pastoral Conference, 1949), p. 3.

answer to the question of who should make that contact, Lilly proclaims:

The religious training of a congregation is incumbent upon the pastor as well as preacher, and especially in the work of following up and restoring the delinquent. The pastor knows best how to estimate the value of the soul. He knows best the nature of broken vows; understands best the delinquent's great peril and can better fathom the depth of woe that yawns beneath his wayward feet. His duty is to go out after the delinquent with diligence and perseverance, and find no rest until the lost is found. There hangs an untold burden of responsibility upon the pastor in reference to his proper treatment of delinquent members.

But it would be foolish to expect the pastor to make all such contacts himself. Not only because there is so much other work for him to do, but also because the visit of people other than the pastor will help the delinquent member to be aware of the concern that his church has for him, do we believe that the personal contacts should be made by officers and members of the congregation. Can any one deny that the pastor needs the assistance and cooperation of the leaders of the congregation in making the approach to the wayward? Dautenhahn declares:

Mowhere does the pastor need to amplify his voice and multiply his feet as much as in keeping up with delinquent adult members. The wise church will provide enough deacons so that church attendance, communion, and stewardship records can be scrutinized systematically and effectively, so that delinquents in these phases of activity can be admonished and reclaimed.

⁷A. W. Lilly, "What Is the Duty of the Church toward Her Delinquent Members?", Lutheran Quarterly, VIII (1878), 239.

SDautenhahn and Gallert, op. cit., p. 2.

Lilly concurs in this by his remarks:

Pastors need the strong and steady support and practical sympathy of the Church Council. The officers of the Church are essentially partners with the pastor in administering the affairs of the Church. . . The duty binding on Church officers toward members is to encourage them in the right way, to influence them to activity and fidelity, and with the pastor to throw over them the shield of protection from evil, and follow the delinquents step by step with all the winning appliances of kindness and persevering effort to secure their return.

This is particularly true if the delinquent presents an unusually difficult problem. For that reason Hermann says that

the pastor and elders will call on the "problem" cases, or such cases where a member or members are grossly out of line, either by sins of commission or omission. That has always been considered their work because special cases require specialized evangelical care.

With the pastor and elders thus going into action, the work involved in making the approach to the delinquents will not be heaped upon one man, and the calls will be completed more rapidly.

But even then the action would be too limited. Going into action to rewin the delinquents must include the use of personal contacts by the members of the congregation. Even

⁹Lilly, op. cit., p. 240.

¹⁰J. E. Herrmann, "Suggested Home Visitation Program for Delinquent Members." (Unpublished Stewardship Bulletin by J. E. Herrmann, Stewardship Counselor of the Lutheran Church-Hissouri Synod, St. Louis, Nissouri, issued in 1950), p. 1

before the pastor can discover the wayward tendency of some member, that condition may become apparent to one of the fellow members, and a prompt but brotherly admonition might be all that is needed to arrest the delinquent tendency. Therefore Lilly contends that

of declension treated, the majority of delinquents might be spared. Members have opportunities of knowing the tendencies and habits of their associates which neither the pastor not the Church Council can know. And to feel it a duty to correct the indications of remissness might save a soul from danger; and the magnetism and winning force of personal sympathy and kind approaches should prompt all church members to seek and find and save the delinquent.

In addition to their closer association with the wayward member, and their responsibility toward him as fellow members, very often the amount of work to be done makes it necessary to have the members of the congregation participate in the work of contacting the delinquent. Herrmann asserts that when he declares:

The pastor and the elders cannot possibly reach all of the delinquent members personally. The W. S. mails can never take the place of personal calls. Therefore we must win more of our members to do this important work.12

Sometimes it may be very profitable to have a member accompany the pastor or the elders in making the contact. Winter suggests taking along other witnesses rather than Board members, so that the erring brother cannot consider them biased, especially

¹¹Lilly, op. cit., p. 241.

¹²Herrmann, op. cit., p. 2.

if some of the church officers have previously had dealings with him. He asks: "Why not take along a good friend of his who loves his Savior and his Church so that the wayward member must say, 'He loves me, he's after my welfare, my salvation. (#13)

The most systematic way of employing the members of the Congregation in the work of contacting the delinquents is to set up a definite program of visits to the homes. Dautenhahn strongly advocates this method when he avows:

Personal interest and home visitations on the part of other members is a necessary adjunct to official visitations. Systematic home visitations by trained couples presenting a church yearbook with a message are very effective. Develop ties and impart information, and convince the skeptical, "The Church is a going and a growing concern." Delinquents may be assigned to a specific family which cultivates friendships and influences their thinking.14

Assigning delinquents to specific families is an idea which Archibald also suggests. As a means for regaining delinquents, he proposes a program of enlarged and deepened spiritual fellowship, through a system which he describes as a neighborhood zone program. Basically, this is a zoning plan by which active members from the same districts as delinquents are acked to encompass the backsliding brethren with friendly interest, good will, and fellowship. At first they do not

¹³ Winter, op. cit., p. 263.

¹⁴ Dautenhahn and Gallert, op. cit., p. 2.

approach the delinquents as a church group, nor do they solicit their return to the church. Instead, they plan a home fellowship hour once each month and invite them as neighbors to the fellowship group. Later on there can be more direct appeals to the spiritual life of the delinquents. 15 While we feel that Archibald's suggestion has its merits, we would favor a more decisive approach to the spiritual problem. In any case, however, it would seem profitable if the members who make the contacts with the delinquents have been chosen as those best qualified to do this type of work. That is the advice given by Herrmann, who proposes that visitors who will call on delinquent members should not be secured on a volunteer basis, but carefully chosen, and then briefed by the pastor in the theme of their conversation with these whom they are to visit. These visitors could then carry on with the work by calling on each delinquent member every three months, with each worker calling on from three to five families or persons, 16

We should go into action promptly, then, and by contacts through the mails, advertising, and personal visits inform the delinquent of our concern for him. We should make it evident that we are seeking to rewin him for the Savior, and

¹⁵A. G. Archibald, Establishing the Converts (Philadelphia: Judson Press, 1952), p. 104.

¹⁶ Herrmann, op. cit., p. 1.

so as we go into action we want to be able to know what we are doing. Although going into action means approaching each individual delinquent as a distinct and separate case, there are certain facts which we should consider for "making the approach."

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CHAPTER VI

MAKING THE APPROACH

Attitudes of the Visitor

If we would be able to determine beforehand what the reaction of the delinquent member is going to be when we make the approach, perhaps we would not be so apprehensive and uncertain as we begin to knock at his door. Because we may previously have encountered resentment, bitterness, or animosity in some of the calls which we have made on other delinquent members in the past, it seems that we would tend to make the approach with serious misgivings about both the welcome which we may receive and the good which we may accomplish. But if we are to achieve the goal of rewinning the delinquent, it certainly will not help the work if we begin it with preconceived notions of failure. Whether it is the pastor, one or two of the elders, or simply a member or two of the congregation who are making the approach, the visit will be most effective if it possesses the nature of an informal but genuine Christian witness, in which one member of the Body of Christ is seeking to edify another. Herrmann tells us that

calls should be made as informally as possible, so that they appear as unofficial as possible. A member is calling on a member, sharing with him what Christ should mean to them both in faith and life.

¹J. E. Herrmann, "Suggested Home Visitation Program for Delinquent Members." (Unpublished Stewardship Bulletin by J. E. Herrmann, Stewardship Counselor of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, St. Louis, Missouri, issued in 1950), p. 1.

After the workers have introduced themselves, Crossland suggests that they "establish a friendly atmosphere through conversation about matters of mutual interest, such as the home, the family, the friends, the church, or the community."2

In order to win the delinquent's attention and interest in what we have to say, we should make clear to him the fact that we are concerned about him and interested in his welfare. Schumacher stresses the significance of sympathetic interest in the individual for the purpose of gaining his agreement. This means that the pastor should come with a concern "for him," without assuming a "holier than thou" attitude. The pastor or worker should not ignore or minimize the prospect's problems, but show him that he understands and wants to help. "Admit, if necessary, that he has real problems. But if he has mistaken notions that must be removed. . . . show him his error quietly and pleasantly, 'in the spirit of meekness.'"3 This attitude of helping the delinquent solve his problems by a mutual sharing of Christian experiences will be very profitable as we make the approach. Again it is Herrmann who declares:

The visitor should develop his topic in such a way as

W. F. Crossland, How to Increase Church Membership and Attendance (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1949), p. 136.

³John Schumacher, "Each One Reach One-Bible Topic Study," Today, II (November, 1947), 20.

to stress what it means to him personally. He has come to share his Christian experiences with his brother, not to "put the brother on the spot." Questions tactfully put will result in discussion. And it is here where the visitor will carefully but effectively reach the heart of those on whom he calls.

What basic attitude should be dominant then as we make the approach? In answer to that question we found that one after another, the sources consulted agreed that it is love. The assertion of Archibald seems to represent the feeling of many others, who would be willing to concur with him that "the best appraach is one of love, kindness, and deep concern—a genuine concern that reflects the concern of God lest one of His followers should drift away." Powell adds to this thought by saying:

Love wins. Let the absentee members know the heavenly Father loves them more than ever; that He is longing as deeply for the sight of their faces as the father of the prodigal son. . . Let them know that the spirit of the church is not critical, but fraternal. All the people are longing to see them again, to enjoy the gladmess of having the circle of fellowship again complete.

Unless the Christian spirit of love is the prevailing tone of our approach, Lilly contends that the work will probably not be successful. He maintains that

⁴Herrmann, loc. cit.

Judson Press, 1952), p. 101. Converts (Philadelphia:

Sidney Powell, Where Are the People? (Nashville: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1942), p. 148.

success in reclaiming delinquents depends much on the spirit and manner of approaching them. Kindness and caution would direct the shepherd's mission. So a Christian spirit could alone be successful in reestablishing Christian relations with a delinquent. No one would expect to reform broken alliances in a spirit of vengeance. Nothing can be effected in winning soulds by frowns and scowls and fulminations of terrible retribution.

This spirit of love demands that in making the approach, we put the best construction on everything. To do that, Crossland suggests that workers who call on delinquents make the approach with what he terms seven "valid assumptions" about the wayward brother. He lists them as follows:

That his name is on the church roll as a member.
That his name is on the church roll as a member.
That at one time he was interested and attended the church.
That he has often resolved to "begin again."
That he will at first offer excuses or reasons for his loss of interest and his absenteeism.
That he knows in his heart that he should be a more active Christian and churchman.
That he probably feels an obligation and a desire to renew his loyalty.8

With this attitude of love guiding us as we make the approach, the delinquent will be more apt to recognize our concern for him and less apt to misinterpret the purpose of our visit.

Making the approach in love requires courtesy and good conduct, and this does not imply that the visitor must be on

⁷A. W. Lilly, "What Is the Duty of the Church Toward Her Delinquent Members?" <u>Lutheran Quarterly</u>, VIII (1878), 237-38.

⁸crossland, op. cit., p. 135.

the defensive. According to Schumacher, the worker should be positive but courteous in his approach. One should not assume an apologetic attitude as though it is necessary to apologize for being concerned about someone's soul. As a representative of the King of Kings, the worker has no cause for shame. But one should be courteous and avoid all rudeness and impertinence. "It is quite possible to be frank and yet perfectly courteous."9 Winter points out that such is the advice provided in Gal. 6:1, which urges us to restore the wayward in a "spirit of meekness."10 Among the rules for proper conduct in winning souls, Torrey lists courtesy in a gentle and winning manner, being "dead in earnest," patience and control of your temper, and refusal to argue in your discussion. 11 And although Lilly does not use the word courtesy, we might say that it is the essence of his description of the successful approach, for he says: "It requires patience and forbearance, and the administration of tact and sympathy in the sympathy of Christ and in the love of a brother. "12

⁹Schumacher, loc. cit.

¹⁰v. H. Winter, "Dealing With Delinquent Members,"
Theologische Quartalschrift, XLV (October, 1948), 257.

¹¹R. A. Torrey, <u>How To Bring Men to Christ</u> (Chicago: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1893), pp. 97-99.

¹²Lilly, op. cit., p. 238.

Techniques of the Visitor

Sary attitudes for making the approach. But it should prove helpful for us if we are acquainted with some of the tested and proven techniques which we might employ in making the approach. One of the first aids which was mentioned repeatedly by various writers is really more of a skill than a technique. It is the use of tact. Evans states that "tact supplies the lack of many talents; indeed, the lack of it is oftentimes fatal. A little tact and wise management very often gain a point which could be gained in no other way." Charles E. Hay leaves no room for doubt about the need for tack when he asserts:

In dealing with individual cases as they occur, detecting real causes of neglect, discriminating just sentiment from doctrinal error and shallow pretext, the pastor and those associated with him will require all their knowledge of human nature and all the tact which they can command. 14

Schumacher also acknowledges the importance of tact, saying,
"There is no place in our religion where the grace of tact
or good practical common sense is needed so much as in the
face-to-face work of winning souls for Christ," and he de-

¹³William Evans, Personal Soul-Winning (Chicago: The Bible Institute Colportage Association, c.1910), p. 22.

¹⁴Charles E. Hay, "Status and Treatment of the Non-Communing Adult Member," <u>Lutheran Quarterly</u>, XXI (1891), 556.

fines tact as "the ability to say the right thing at the right time in the right manner." Evans expands the definition of tact by noting that

tact is nothing more or less than skill and facility in dealing with men. Tact has been called the life of the five senses: it is the open eye, the quick ear, the judging taste, the keen smell, the lively touch. Tact knows what to do and when and how to do it. 16

Tact is something that comes naturally to some people, while others must acquire a sense of tact through experience. So in our concern to use tact, Schumacher warns us:

Do not neglect the attack; in your caution to do the right thing, do not neglect to do anything; in your concern to begin right, do not neglect to begin. Tact will come with experience. It is better to begin awkwardly than not to begin at all. 17

Tact, as we said, is more of a skill than a technique, but it is of tremendous value in making our technique effective.

The technique itself will include conversation with the delinquent. Because of the nature of the visit, the conversation should be aimed at the goal of rewinning the delinquent. But in our zeal to reach that goal, we must not neglect the highly important technique of listening. In order to learn how to converse with the delinquent, as well as listen to him, we would do well to consider some of the basic principles

Schumacher, loc. cit.

¹⁶ Evans, op. cit., p. 21.

¹⁷ Schumacher, loc. cit.

of the interview method. Everett W. Duvall has this to say on the subject:

Generically, interviewing is a process of mutual viewing, a co-operative enterprise in which each participant
gains some insight into the thoughts, feelings, and
attitudes of the other. . . All definitions, practical
and academic, stress the fact that interviewing is a
2-way process. Only as the worker accepts this conception and realizes that what he is and what he does
are important factors in the interview will he master
the techniques of the art.18

Bingham and Moore agree with Duvall that the interview has a reciprocal nature, and emphasize the fact that the success of the interview depends on more than just the words that are spoken. They inform us:

There is a give-and-take between interviewer and interviewee; and we must recognize that not only spoken words, but other means of face-to-face communication also, are used. Inflection, qualities of voice, facial expression, glint of the eye, postures, gestures, and general behavior supplement what is said. They all contribute to the purposeful exchange of meanings which is the interview.

If we are going to employ the interview method as a technique for carrying on an effective conversation with the delinquent and a means for rewinning the wayward soul, then we shall have to cultivate the art of listening. Powell gives this advice:

Don't argue; listen. Be quick to admit it when the church is in the wrong. Christian humility was once

Personality and Social Group Work (New York: Association Press, 1943), p. 141.

¹⁹Bingham and Moore, How To Interview (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1941), p. 1.

laughed at, but today we see that it is the best salesmanship. The most successful businessmen have learned the truth of the Bible statement, "A soft answer turneth away wrath." 20

It is particularly important to listen if the delinquent has a complaint to make, even though his argument may not be a valid one. L. M. Zimmerman remarks:

The discerning pastor will soon discover that the wordy complainant at best has a poor case to present. One good method here is to allow the complainant to express his grievances even to the limit, to listen with the utmost patience to all he has to say, to allow him to talk himself completely out. 21

By letting the delinquent have his say, much of the inner tension and bitterness in his heart is removed, as Powell indicates by his statement:

Listening is sometimes the best sort of argument. It is an expression of sympathy that heals many a wound. When people want to discuss a grievance let them do it. They spill most of their rancor in the process. 22

What the delinquent has to say when he tells his story may not, of course, always present a complete and accurate picture of the true situation. Commenting on excuses and arguments which delinquents may employ in their conversation with the visitor, Crossland asserts:

Some of these are spiritual defense mechanisms created to avoid facing honestly Christ and one's duty. Others

²⁰powell, op. cit., p. 146.

²¹L. M. Zimmerman, The Gospel Minister (Baltimore: Meyer and Thalheimer, 1930), p. 79.

²²Powell, loc. cit.

are irreligious smoke screens, which are laid to hide the real reasons. Still others are nothing but red herrings of argument and prejudice drawn across the path of conversation to divert you. It will be your delicate and exciting task, with the help of God and your teammate, to remove these barriers that shut your fellowmembers away from God and the Church.23

Crossland does not believe that it is too difficult to overcome the excuses and arguments which the delinquent may
raise, for he claims:

These common excuses and difficulties can be dissolved. Because excuses are usually a spiritual camouflage or a mask which the mind wears to hide the real issues, you will not find them overly difficult to meet. Persuade, but never argue. Counsel constructively, and help your fellow member find the solution to his own religious problems. Accent the affirmative; avoid the negative.24

Carefully worded questions may help the visitor get at the basic problem of the delinquent, but leading questions should be avoided. Duvall draws attention to the care which should be exercised in phrasing questions when he remarked:

Asking questions requires special care to avoid building up tensions or eliciting answers that the interviewee may think the interviewer would like and approve but that do not reveal the facts in the situation litalics ourself. 25

Unless questions are used with care, new tensions may develop and destroy the rapport which has been established. Duvall explains how this may happen as he declares:

²³crossland, op. cit., pp. 138-39.

²⁴crossland, op. c1t., pp. 139-140.

²⁵Duvall, op. cit., p. 146.

Even after rapport has been established and the interview has been proceeding satisfactorily, tensions may arise and resistance develop out of the habitual reaction patterns of the interviewee or from the probing of unsuspected spots of sensitivity. The interviewee may become contrasuggestive, raise objections to modes of procedure that had apparently been accepted, or resort to such "escape devices" as defensive lying, rationalization, and attempts to divert the course of the interview to a more comfortable tangent or to start an argument over an unimportant point. The effect of open conflict or personality clashes on the success of the interview is obvious. Thus, when a frontal attack brings responses that endanger the maintenance of rapport, other procedures must be employed.

Symonds has suggested a number of techniques which Duvall finds useful for overcoming resistance and lessening tensions when they appear. Among the several which he lists are the following:

Simulated agreement—the admission of fallibility or error on the part of the interviewer. . . . Analyzing a general statement into specific parts—point out where one specific instance or experience has been made the basis for generalizing that may be an overinterpretation. . . Display no shock or surprise—be objective toward the problem but sympathetic toward the interviewee. . . Note evasions but do not press by frontal attack—return to them later. . . . Ignore overemotional responses such as weeping, anger, or sullenness. Describe the ultimate outcome of things as they are going—it is important that the interviewee see his present situation in the light of its eventual consequences. 27

Making use of such suggestions depends on the circumstances of each case, and it may be that we would not find these

^{26&}lt;sub>Duvall, op. cit., p. 147</sub>.

²⁷Duvall, op. cit., pp. 147-48, as quoted from P. M. Symonds Diagnosing Personality and Conduct (New York: D. Appleton Century Company, 1931), pp. 464-69.

methods to be completely suitable for dealing with the type of problems which we encounter when making the approach to the delinquents.

Crossland proposes several procedures which seem more pertinent to our subject. His advice is to

keep the conversation always on the high level of agreement. After you have answered many questions, criticisms, or objections as tactfully and persuasively as you can, always return to the main objective of your visit. Always bring the mind of your prospect back to those broad foundations of our Christian faith, such as God, Christ, the values of the church, Christian ideals, and Christian character, where there is substantial and friendly agreement. 28

But even then, the statement of Duvall is worth noting:

The climax of the diagnostic interview is reached when "the secret is out," the confession has been made, or the irritating source of conflict has been uncovered. This stage may not be reached in the first interview because of certain inhibitions, which may lapse or disappear before a second interview.29

Although we generally think of the interview as a technique for solving problems or providing motivations when someone approaches us with a difficulty of some sort, nevertheless the basic methods, as they have been briefly discussed here, should also be valuable aids for our use when we make the approach to the delinquent.

Another technique, closely related to the interview, and, in fact, sometimes incorporated with it, is that process

²⁸crossland, op. cit., p. 142.

^{29&}lt;sub>Duvall</sub>, op. cit., p. 148.

which we might designate the act of leading the soul to Christ, and pointing him to his responsibility to the Savior. This could also be called an appeal to his sense of accountability, a process which Lilly describes in the words:

They must be made to feel the binding nature of their covenant with Christ. They must be made to see the magnitude of the injury they inflict upon the Church, and the aid and comfort they give the enemies of religion. They must see the exposure of their profession to the contempt of the world, and the imperiled condition of their salvation. 30

Winter believes that this is the meaning of Matt. 18:15, for he declares:

"Tell him" means convince him, convict him, <u>ueberfuehre</u>
<u>ihn</u>, persuade him of his error and the folly and suicide
of his ways, correct him, refute him, confute him. Restore him from his erring way and gain him for Christ.31

But if we wish to be able to convince him and gain him for Christ, then we must make the delinquent realize that we are not simply telling him what we think, but what God thinks. And the simplest way to do that is to show him what God thinks, to bear witness with the word of God. Evans emphasizes the importance of using the Scriptures in the effort to win or rewin individual souls, and he contends that this includes having memorized pertinent passages, together with the location of each, and also having the individual person

³⁰ Lilly, op. cit., p. 242.

³¹ Winter, op. cit., p. 259.

see and read the text from the Bible himself. 32 The method of having the person with whom you are working read the text himself is also endorsed by Torrey. After the person has read a specific text aloud in your presence, Torrey proposes that you ask him then what he thinks it means, and by a series of questions and points of explanation lead him to see that it applies directly to him, so that he is willing to admit that himself. 33 For the delinquent to draw that conclusion is in keeping with the best guidance techniques, too, for Bingham and Moore tell us that

the motivating function is most effectively performed when decision springs naturally and inevitably out of the client's own realization of the facts of his situation, instead of being handed to him or imposed by his adviser. 34

When we make use of the Scriptures in dealing with delinquents, we must be sure that the passages which we select are pertinent to the case under consideration. We need to give constant care and attention to the individual soul, and as Lang points out, though both Law and Gospel must be rightly applied, "the order, the way, the method by which this is done must not be arbitrary, but must be fitted to the personality of the individual soul to achieve results." 35

^{33&}lt;sub>Torrey, op. cit., pp. 22-23.</sub>

³⁴ Bingham and Moore, op. cit., p. 181.

³⁵Titus Lang, "Case Histories in Individual Soul Winning," Today, V (September, 1950), p. 15.

According to Hillmer, making use of the Scriptures in this way is really the proper practice of evangelism, for he states:

By placing the problem of delinquent members into the realm of evangelism you at the same time point up the solution. The only means which we use in evangelism are the Law and the Gospel, and it is only the Law and the Gospel, with proper applications, that will make the inactive active again. 30

Evangelism, however, does not limit itself to the use of the Evangel. If the love of Christ does not warm their cold and sluggish hearts, then the Law of Christ must be used to stir their conscience and arouse them from their indifference. For this reason Evans asserts:

If men will not respond to the higher motive of love, there is then nothing else for us to do than to appeal to the lower motive of fear. We must "by all means save some." If Mount Calvary will not melt the heart of the sinner, then we must take him to Mount Sinai, that it may be broken into penitence. 37

The application of the Law is essential when we are confronted with a cool, indifferent attitude on the part of the backslider. Thus we see that the French theologian Vinet says:

When we have obtained their hearing, we must destroy their security, and show them that though their character is indifferent, their position is not. We must not hesitate to employ the agency of fear; in most cases, it is even impossible to bring back the idea of God to the soul without introducing the sentiment of fear. But, without altogether abandoning this agency, we must, if

³⁶W. H. Hillmer, "Proposing a Program of Internal Evangelism," Today, V (November, 1950), p. 14.

³⁷ Evans, op. cit., p. 56.

we can bring any other chords into vibration, seek to affect them by these gentler chords. 38

But whether it be Law or Gospel, or both, the use of Scripture is a technique which we most certainly should not neglect in making the approach.

As we seek to lead the soul back to Christ and a sense of his responsibility to the Savier, and as we direct the wayward member to the truth of Holy Writ for him, we should also bear in mind the fact that the delinquent should reaffirm his faith and renew his pledge of loyalty to Christ. To help and guide him to that end, we should employ some technique that will clarify the meaning of faith and at the same time provide an incentive for genuine commitment. Elmer G. Homrighausen furnishes us with a very thorough analysis of the terms decision and commitment, which should prove helpful to us when we discuss the implications of these words, Homrighausen supplies this definition:

The two terms, decision and commitment, are often used synonymously. They do not mean the same thing, however. Decision means separation, being cut off from, making a sharp differentiation. Decision means bringing the discussion to an end in favor of one side or the other. There is something final and crucial about decision. It marks the resolution of an either-or; it marks the parting of the ways. 39

³⁸A. Vinet, <u>Pastoral Theology</u>: <u>The Theory of a Gospel Ministry</u>, translated from the French by Thomas C. Summers (Nashville: Publishing House of the M. E. Church, South, Bingham, and Smith, Agents, 1902), p. 321.

³⁹Elmer G. Homrighausen, Choose Ye This Day (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, c.1943), p. 59.

Speaking of commitment, he remarks:

Commitment is positive. It is a giving over of something to another's keeping. It means to entrust, to pledge, to surrender. One who is committed is pledged to a line of action. In the case of Christian commitment, it is more than decision: it is an actual personal trust in Jesus Christ and his guidance and way of thought and life. It is faith. Commitment is an act, and yet it is a lifelong attitude. 40

Later, he ties both concepts together when he says that "only in repentance can real decision and commitment take place." 41 When the delinquent realizes the serious nature of the case and recognizes the visitor's concern for him, he can hardly avoid making a decision. But as an additional aid for use in the technique of leading the delinquent to a decision to renew his loyalty to Christ, Crossland proposes the use of a loyalty pledge or card on which the member could sign his name. Crossland provides an illustration of such a card on which the following words are inscribed:

I desire to renew my Loyalty to Christ and His Church

--f--

I will endeavor to attend at least one service of worship each Sunday during the next three months unless prevented by circumstances beyond my control 42

Although we might wish to expand the thoughts contained in

⁴⁰ Homrighausen, op. cit., pp. 59-60.

⁴¹ Homrighausen, op. cit., pp. 60-62.

⁴² Crossland, op. cit., pp. 142-143.

the statement on the card, the idea of having such a concrete evidence of the member's intentions is certainly valuable.

Past experience has shown that many delinquents do not indicate a favorable response the first time that someone has made the approach to rewin them for Christ. Stubbornness, pride, or indifference may have begun to harden their hearts so that they are indifferent, if not also hostile, to the appeal presented by the worker. For this reason, we need to master the technique of persistence, and patience and determination are primary qualifications for persistence in making the approach. Archibald declares the need for patient perseverance when he contends:

We give up too quickly and too easily. The easy way out of the situation--but not the Christian way--is to cut off the lapsed members and be rid of them. But no church can thus lightly escape its responsibility. When once the church has received a convert into its membership, it must accept and thereafter discharge the task of developing in that convert a mature Christian character; and should one of these converts go astray, the church with watchfulness, patience, and prayer must do all in its power to recover that member. 43

For successful work in dealing with individuals, Schumacher also stresses the necessity of persistence. He points out that this means avoiding the common yet serious mistake of haste, and refusing to give up because of one failure, He offers this advice: "Rather than accept failure with dejection, it would be better to return home and think through the case

⁴³Archibald, op. cit., p. 107.

to see why the effort failed. Pray over it, and then if you can, go back and try again."44 Persistence, however, requires more than just patience and determination. It means, as Schumacher just suggested, trying again, but that second try should not be delayed for a lengthy period of time. The sooner that we return to follow up the first contact, the better. Thus Mr. Johnson says:

The effectiveness of every step that is taken is almost always increased if letters, visits, etc., follow one another in close succession. A long period of silence from the church allows the effect of a visit or a letter to wear off before there is another visit or letter, and after a long interval it is almost necessary to begin all over again in the handling of the case.

When we remember that our purpose is to rewin the delinquent, we cannot escape the conclusion that it is vital to continue in our efforts to gain the backslider, and to do so at intervals frequent enough to prevent his retrogression from going still further. Timing the intervals between contacts depends on the type of contact that is made, and the peculiar conditions of each case. This, too, is a skill which comes by experience. But when coupled with patience, it is indeed another valuable technique for meeting the problem.

⁴⁴Schumacher, op. cit., pp. 20-21.

E. G. Johnson, "A Layman's Views on Dealing With Delinquents." (Unpublished paper read before a Lutheran Pastoral Conference at Trinity Lutheran Church, Alton, Illinois), p. 9.

Proposals for Preservation

It would most certainly be a depressing thing if, after all our efforts, none of the delinquents would be willing to renew their loyalty to the Savior and return to an active church membership. But it would be even more depressing if some who had been rewon would once again lapse in their loyalty and be lost. The fact is that many will return, when, by the help of God, we make the approach. Here, too, the Holy Spirit will be at work in our witness to the Word, and the power of God's grace will demonstrate its activity in the evidence of many restorations. But the fact also remains that the devil, the world, and the Old Adam will be at work in those delinquents who have professed a desire and a willingness to reaffirm their faith, and they will be in danger of backsliding again. And so as we make the approach, we should provide some means for sustaining and keeping those delinquent members who do give heed to our exhortations and admonitions, who with contrite hearts return to praise and serve the Savior. As we make the approach, therefore, we ought to let the delinquents know that they can be of service to God and their church. We should also take precautionary measures to preserve and strengthen them in the faith when they return. The proposals for preservation which we have discovered from the sources consulted do not constitute a complete list of all the means which we might employ for that

purpose, but they lay the basic foundation.

One proposal for preserving the returned delinquents is that of integrating them at once into the life and activities of the congregation. Sweazy believes that "most backsliding is not due to any grievance or change of heart, but simply to carelessness," and he contends that "it can be cured by bracing too weak good intentions with a framework of definite duties." In addition to a share of the responsibilities, Lilly proclaims that we need to give them our love and interest, for he declares:

The return of delinquents to their allegiance requires caution but cordial attention. Give them the strongest proof of your confidence, and convince them of being cordially welcome. Give them full share of your sympathy and trust. Place into their hands such work as they are capable to manage. Interest begets interest and love begets love. Give them something to do. 47

Unless we engage the delinquent personally with some understanding of the importance of his service, Dautenhahn claims that our work is incomplete. He says: "A delinquent adult or child is won completely only when he is enlisted personally in the expansion program of the congregation. (We grow internally to expand externally." That does not imply that

George E. Sweazey, Effective Evangelism: The Greatest Work in the World (New York: Harper and Brothers, c.1953), p. 247.

⁴⁷Lilly, op. cit., p. 243.

⁴⁸D. D. Dautenhahn and A. R. Gallert, "A Program of Expansion" (Essay delivered at Texas Pastoral Conference, 1949), p. 3.

he must spend a certain number of hours each week doing nothing but church work. Rather, it means that he should be aware of opportunities where he can render a special service, and above all, recognize that as a child of God, he should present a Christian witness in every phase of his life.

That proposal for preservation is dependent on another and that is a continuous program of Christian education. The Gospel will always provide the motivation, but often the people need instruction so that they may know what to do. The sermons that guide the people to a proper understanding of their vocation as Christians will therefore also serve as a means for preservation. Lilly tells us that "from the pulpit must go out the utterances of God's law and man's duty without fear or fayor of man. Let no man become a delinquent through ignorance of his duty."49 The people should be able to apply their faith to the contemporary situations of their daily life. Looking for other proposals for preservation, we find that Hillmer has compiled an excellent list of suggestions which could be utilized as means for preventing people from becoming delinquent. (Among his recommendations are: (1) an attempt to make teaching and preaching related to life; (2) a closer personal touch with the individual members on the part of the pastor and the elders, so that each home

⁴⁹Lilly, op. cit., p. 239.

receives a visit at least once each year; (3) a system to enlist more of our people in the service of the Lord and their church, in areas of service for which the Lord has fitted them; and (4) an increased attention to new members so that they are properly introduced to the church and enlisted in the full program of the congregation. 50

With these thoughts in mind, it seems reasonable to conclude we are delinquent ourselves if we fail to do all that is in our power to rewin those who become backsliders, or neglect to make provisions for preserving the faith of those who have become members of our congregations. The work is difficult, but it is not impossible. The problem is genuine, the challenge unavoidable. Realizing that without the blessing of the Lord the work would be fruitless, we admit the truth which Boss emphasizes in his statement:

Strictly speaking, of course, we cannot keep souls at all. We confess with Luther that the Holy Ghost alone can keep souls in the one true faith. Although we know that God alone can keep the souls of men, we must, nevertheless, work at keeping as though everything depended on us.51

But with the help of God and trusting Him for His guidance and blessing, we can approach the delinquent and rewin him and keep him for Christ!

⁵⁰Hillmer, op. cit., p. 24.

⁵¹Walter G. Boss, "Reaching, Winning, and Keeping--These Three!", Today, II (November, 1947), 5.

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