

Membership Search, Audit and Care

In light of 2001 General Assembly action to delete 1997 *Manual* paragraph 112.4, and the passing of resolution LA-404, the Board of General Superintendents is providing this tool to assist in the membership search, audit, and care of your church.

Board of General Superintendents
Church of the Nazarene

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Unless otherwise noted, all references to the *Manual* are from the 2001-2005 edition published by Nazarene Publishing House, Kansas City, Missouri, 2001.

Preface

The Board of General Superintendents is providing this booklet in order to help the local church comply with the 2001 General Assembly action calling for a membership audit during the 2002-2003 assembly year, and to further help the local church:

- Locate lost members.
- Have a record of names and addresses that equals the total membership reported to the district assembly.
- Encourage inactive members to become active participants.
- Develop an ongoing system of membership care.

We are encouraging pastors to work with their local church boards and laity in carrying out these tasks. Every member of the local church who is not now involved was once an active participant in worship, ministry, tithing, and developing relationships within the church. Many—especially when confronted with a crisis—may still consider your church their church home. The act of becoming a member of the Church of the Nazarene is a significant covenant between a person/family and the local church.

The membership search and audit is to be a careful review of the church family records. Your search and audit may find all members present and actively maturing in their faith. If so, take time to rejoice and press on with your mission. However, you may find a discrepancy in the record keeping—maybe the number of member names does not equal the number of members reported to your district assembly. In this case, you will need to reconcile the differences to restore integrity to your membership rolls. Or you may face the reality of Jesus' parables in Luke 15:3-32—there are members who are lost and need to be found. We hope that our prayers, the philosophies expressed, and the resources contained in this booklet will encourage and support your church in this important task.

It is important to follow the procedures of the *Manual* in order to avoid legal liability.

A Brief History of *Manual* Changes

The 1976 General Assembly made two changes in the *Manual* regarding removal of members. Paragraph 111.1 was added requiring a “120 day waiting period of prayer and supplication” between the action of the church board to remove a member’s name and the official removal from the membership roll. The second change was the addition of paragraph 111.5, which required the local church to get District Advisory Board and district superintendent approval before removing more than 10% of their membership in any one year.

The 1985 General Assembly introduced another modification to the process of dealing with members who are no longer actively participating in the church. The 1985 *Manual* paragraphs 109-109.2 made it possible to “designate persons as ‘inactive members.’” Officially, inactive members are reported in denominational statistics as full members (109.3); however, these members are not eligible to vote in church meetings or to hold office (109.4). In addition, the 1985 General Assembly provided that “after two years from the date when a person’s membership was declared inactive, his or her name may be removed from the church roll by action of the church board” (112.3).

The 2001 General Assembly passed Resolution LA-428 and removed the 1997 *Manual* paragraph 112.4, which required the local church to get district approval in order to remove more than 10% of their membership (111.5 in the 1976 *Manual*).

In addition, the 2001 General Assembly passed Resolution LA-404, making the 2002-2003 church year a “year of membership audit and reconciliation” so that all churches would have a “‘correct and accurate’ membership roll after having followed the protocol of *Manual* paragraph 109.2.”

A Philosophy of Church Membership

Church membership is a significant, spiritual step in the life of the member and the church. Membership represents:

- An expression of faith in Jesus Christ as savior.
- A covenant relationship between the member and the church.
- A sense of identity with the Church of the Nazarene and holiness doctrine.
- A place to offer and carry out one's service to God.
- The legal right and responsibility to vote on church business.
- The potential to serve on the church board or hold some other church office.
- The potential to serve on district and general boards, committees, and conventions.

Joining the Church of the Nazarene is not a step to be taken lightly. Likewise, removing a person from membership should not be taken lightly.

In the parables of the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the lost son (Luke 15:3-32), Jesus suggests the importance of careful accounting in the kingdom. The shepherd knows one sheep is missing, the woman knows a coin is lost, and the father rejoices when the errant son returns.

When they became members, we welcomed them into the "sacred fellowship" of the church. We said, "There is in [the church] such hallowed fellowship as cannot otherwise be known." (*Manual*, 801.) The image of the church as a family, committed to each other by covenant and love, describes this fellowship well. Now that some of them may be lost or not actively involved we must follow the example of Jesus' parables and do our best to find them before we remove them from our church records.

Ideas to Reactivate a Nonparticipating Member

- 1) **Plan a procedure for regular contacts:** When absentees begin to miss, have a system for calling or contacting members who are away. Perhaps their second Sunday away a Sunday School teacher calls, then a ministry team leader the next week and then the pastor the next week. One of the sample follow-up letters included in this booklet could be used after a month or more away from worship. Many times the effectiveness of these letters depends on the time of year they are sent. For instance, just before the Christmas or Easter holidays may have more of an impact on some who have become inactive for a while.
- 2) **Send monthly letters from the church:** By regularly communicating the events and activities of the church's ministry, your church has a much better chance of involving fringe members of the congregation. Keep the letters warm, positive, and informative, and include a calendar of events.
- 3) **Quarterly Family Events:** Plan to mix inactive families with the regular attendees. One key to reactivating nonparticipating members is the building of new friendships within the church.
- 4) **Special Seminars:** Bringing in a guest speaker to deal with a felt need of the community can many times reactivate fringe attendees or members. Parenting classes, money management seminars, a marriage enrichment retreat or a prayer series can attract some who may have become distracted from their church home. Special attention should be given to fellowship and sharing times at these activities to help build relational ties.
- 5) **Create new ministry assignments:** Consider their area of giftedness and create a new ministry that will involve them in a more meaningful way in the church's ministries. Sometimes members drift away from a church because they don't feel needed anymore. Ask their advice. Let them know how much your church depends on their partnership. With a new sense of involvement, many may return to active status.
- 6) **Send birthday, anniversary, and Christmas cards.**
- 7) **Ask how you can pray for them.**
- 8) **Invite them to dinner.**
- 9) **Sponsor their children to go to camp.**

Resources for Membership

- **Core Values DVD** (available from USA/Canada Mission/Evangelism)
- **This is the Church of the Nazarene DVD** (available from USA/Canada Mission/Evangelism)
- **New Member Information Packet** (NPH U-115)
- **Church of the Nazarene Membership Card** (NPH R-45)
- **Certificate of Membership** (NPH CT-165)
- **Transfer of Membership Form** (NPH R-50)
- **Application for Church Membership Brochure** (NPH R-30)
- **Welcome to the Church of the Nazarene** (NPH 083-411-2566)

To order the above items listed for NPH, please call toll-free 1-800-877-0700.

4 Reasons to Remove a Member

- 1) They are deceased.
- 2) They have requested to be removed or transferred to another church (*Manual*, 111-111.1, 112.2).
- 3) They have accepted membership in another religious organization (*Manual*, 112.1).
- 4) After two years on the inactive membership roll, the church board elects to remove the member (*Manual*, 112.3).

8 Reasons Not to Remove a Member

- 1) Although inactive, they think of your church as their church home.
- 2) They have requested to be kept on the membership list.
- 3) They have family members or friends in the church that are still praying for them.
- 4) They may once again become receptive to the ministry of the church as they experience major life events like marriages, births, and deaths.
- 5) They will eventually experience a family/personal crisis and may look to the church for spiritual and physical ministry.
- 6) Their best hope for redemption is by the church staying in contact with them.
- 7) When they joined the church, the church made a covenant to care for them.
- 8) The church has their current address and phone number and therefore a connection for building bridges back into their life.

Procedures for Implementing Resolution LA-404

Step 1: The Membership Roll Audit

Question to answer: *Does our membership list equal the total reported to the district assembly last year?*

- A) Enlist the help of your church board, and/or Evangelism and Church Membership Committee (*Manual*, 110-110.8, 138.3).
- B) Write the ending membership total from the 2002 district journal: _____
- C) Retrieve your membership records and make a list of the names of current members. Write the current membership total here:..... _____
- D) In order to balance your current membership list with the 2002 district journal:
- Subtract from your list any new members received since the 2002 district journal: – _____
 - Add to your list any members removed since the 2002 district journal: + _____

This is your reconciled membership total: _____

- E) Is there a difference in the 2002 journal figure on line item B and the “reconciled membership total” in line item D?
- ___ **No.** The totals are the same. Congratulations, your membership list is reconciled. Go to Step 2.
- ___ **Yes.** The 2002 district journal total is higher than the number of names on our membership list. (This will be reconciled in Step 3, Question 1.) For now go to line item F below.
- ___ **Yes.** Our membership list has more names than the 2002 district journal indicates. (This will be reconciled in Step 3, Question 2.) For now go to line item F below.
- F) Double-check the membership list for omissions and/or additions that were in error. If you cannot get your membership list to equal the 2002 district journal total you will be given instruction on how to reconcile your list in Step 3. For now go to Step 2.

Step 2: The Membership Search

Question to answer: *Do we have a current address and phone number for every member?*

- A) Enlist the help of your church board, and/or Evangelism and Church Membership Committee (*Manual*, 110-110.8, 138.3), and/or other laypersons with special abilities in finding and conversing with others.
- B) Make a list of members for which your church does not have current address and phone information.
- C) Make this a matter of prayer—have people or groups pray that lost members will be found.
- D) Use several methods to locate as many lost members as possible, including:
 - Printing the list of names in your church bulletin and/or church newsletter.
 - Using the Internet (www.switchboard.com, “People Search” on www.yahoo.com).
 - Sharing your list with the other Nazarene churches in your area.
- E) Contact those members found by adapting the sample letters on pages 10-12, the ideas on page 4, and other methods you feel God is leading you to use.

Step 3: The Membership Roll Reconciliation

Question 1 to answer: *How should we lower our membership total because we do not have enough names to equal our district journal membership?*

A) If names cannot be associated with the total number in the district journal, reconcile the two by removing the appropriate number by “Removal.”

(Reason: Since you do not know who these people were, you cannot know if they are dead, have transferred to another church, etc. The “removal” category is best suited for this problem.)

Question 2 to answer: *How should we increase our membership total because we have more names on our membership list than the total reported in the district journal?*

A) If there are more names on your membership list than the total number reported in the district journal, reconcile the two by adding the appropriate number by “Transfer in from another Nazarene church.”

(Reason: Since these people have already been received into membership in the past, they should not be counted as new Nazarenes now. That means the best way to reconcile your roll is to account for them by transfer from another Nazarene church . . . even if it is your own!)

Question 3 to answer: *Should any of our nonparticipating members be removed from our membership list?*

A) Enlist the help of your church board, and/or Evangelism and Church Membership Committee (*Manual*, 110-110.8, 138.3).

B) Make a list of nonparticipating members.

C) If not already done, remove any deceased members by “Death.”

D) Make an effort to contact living nonparticipating members. (Refer the resources found on pages 4-5, 7, 10-12.)

E) With the philosophy and ideas expressed on pages 3 and 5, and in accordance with *Manual* paragraphs 107-109.4, 111-112.3, determine whether the member should:

- Stay on the active membership roll (see *Manual*, 107-107.1).
- By action of the church board, be placed on the inactive membership roll (see *Manual*, 109-109.4).

- By action of the church board, and after having been on the inactive - membership roll for two years, be removed from membership (see *Manual*, 112.3).
 - By request of the member, be removed by transfer, commendation, or release (see *Manual* 111-111.1, 112.2).
 - Be removed because of membership in another religious organization (see *Manual* 112.1).
- F) Have the church board review the membership changes your church will be making this assembly year.

Yearly Procedures for Maintaining Your Membership List

- A) Enlist the help of your Church Board, and/or Evangelism and Church Membership Committee (*Manual*, 110-110.8, 138.3).
- B) Compare the changes you are making to your membership list to the total you will be reporting to the district assembly and make sure they reconcile.
- C) Print out or copy the current list of members—and membership changes made during the year—and keep it in your church files with a copy of your district assembly report.
- If your membership records are kept on computer, print out the year-ending list for your files. (Leaving a computer file on a floppy disk or CD is okay, but as computer software programs are updated or changed the file may become unreadable. For an archival file, a printed list is better.)
 - If your membership records are kept on paper, make a copy of the year-ending list for your files.

Important notes

- 1) You may remove from the membership roll anyone requesting that their name be removed, **but it is recommended that you receive their request in writing.**
- 2) The protocol of *Manual* paragraph 109.2 (inactive membership) includes the following:
 - That a member has not attended any religious service for 6 full months without an excuse acceptable to the church board.

- That an attempt has been made to get the member to become active again.
- That the Evangelism and Church Membership Committee has recommended that the person be placed on the inactive membership roll.
- That the church board has voted to place the member's name on the inactive membership role.

General Assembly resolution LA-404 specified that any change in membership be in harmony with *Manual* paragraph 109.2. In relationship to *Manual* paragraph 109.2, *Manual* paragraph 112.3 stipulates that:

- A member must be on the inactive membership roll for two years before being removed.
- It takes church board action to remove names from the inactive membership roll.

Sample Letters

Personal Invitation to a Special Event/Program

Dear <name>,

I am writing to let you know of a special event being planned at <name of church>. In the next few weeks, we will be scheduling this activity to assist our church fellowship in getting to know each other better. God has so made us that we need mutual support and fellowship. In fact, the nature of the Christian faith is that it thrives best within a community of faith.

This special event is being planned for the entire family. It will include activities for men, women, teens and children—the whole family should come!

<write a short paragraph describing the event.>

I hope you will accept this personal invitation to attend the <name of event>. With the <Easter> season upon us, this would be a great time to worship with your friends at the <name> Church of the Nazarene.

You are important to the Lord and our church fellowship.

Warmly,

Personal Inquiry to Nonparticipating Member

Dear <name>,

These are busy days for all of us. If your calendar is anything like mine, it is easy to fill every day with a long list of things to do. As your pastor, I just wanted to touch base with you and let you know you are in my prayers.

If there is anything you need, or if there is something that the church can do for you, please let me know. If you would like to get together, please call me soon—or better yet, see me after the worship service on Sunday to say “Hi” and maybe plan a time to meet further.

You are a valuable part of our congregation.

Prayerfully,

Follow-up After Return to Worship

Dear <name>,

It was great to see you on Sunday! I want you to know that my thoughts and prayers are with you and that seeing you this Sunday was a real encouragement to me.

Please keep me informed as to how I can lift you and your family up to the Lord in prayer. I believe prayer makes a difference and that it will help our congregation grow in love for the Lord and in care for each other.

Hope you have a great day and that you feel God's presence through the week and until we gather again next Sunday to worship Him.

Warmly,

Letter to Member Before Being Placed on Inactive Roll

Dear <name>:

I realize that with the passing of time any number of things take place which make active participation in the life of the church more difficult. When you joined the church, we accepted a responsibility for your spiritual welfare. As your pastor, I want you to know that you are in my thoughts and prayers.

The Church of the Nazarene maintains two categories of membership: active and inactive. The church board has the option to place a member on the inactive roll if that member has not attended any services in the last six months and the church has made an effort to encourage the member's participation.

You are currently classified as an active member, but it has been several months since we have heard from you. Standard procedure would be for the church board to take action by placing you on the inactive membership roll; however, if you would prefer to remain on the active membership roll, please let me know. It is the hope of the church board and I that you will once again become active in the life of our church.

Your circumstances may continue to change but the church will always be here for you and your family. Please let me know how I can pray for you—I would really love to hear from you.

Yours sincerely,

Letter to Member Placed on Inactive Roll

Dear <name>:

I realize that with the passing of time any number of things take place which make active participation in the life of the church more difficult. When you joined the church, we accepted a responsibility for your spiritual welfare. As your pastor, I want you to know that you are in my thoughts and prayers.

The Church of the Nazarene maintains two categories of membership: active and inactive. Members may be placed on the inactive roll by the church board if they have not attended any services in the last six months and the church has made an effort to encourage the member's participation. As instructed by our *Manual* paragraph 109.2, the church is required to notify you of a change in your membership status from our active membership roll to our inactive membership roll.

You may request in writing within the next 120 days to be returned to the active membership roll. Your request should include a reaffirmation of the vows of membership and renewed participation in worship. We are earnestly praying that this will happen.

Active membership has the advantage of being able to vote on official church business, and having the potential to hold a church office. Please feel free to contact me if you have a question about your membership classification.

Your circumstances may continue to change but the church will always be here for you and your family. Please let me know how I can pray for you—I would really love to hear from you.

Yours sincerely,

Letter to Member Removed from Church Roll

Dear <name>:

The church board and I had hoped to see you once again participating in our fellowship. I am sorry to inform you that, in accordance with the procedures set forth in the *Manual* of the Church of the Nazarene, your name has been removed from our membership roll.

The church and I are still here for you. Please feel free to contact me if I can be of assistance to you.

Grace and peace,

Instructions: If your church does not have an adequate system for keeping membership records please use this page. The page may be copied as much as needed (1 page per member). Prepare a notebook with 2 dividers: Current Members and Terminated Members. As you complete a membership record, three hole punch the page and file it alphabetically behind the appropriate divider in the notebook.

Membership Record

Last name: _____

First and middle name: _____

Date of membership: _____ Full member, or Associate member

Birthday: _____ Anniversary date: _____

Other significant dates: _____

Names of relatives and friends in the church: _____

Spiritual gift: _____

Other gifts and talents: _____

Placed on the Inactive Membership Roll by the church board: _____(date)

Date returned to active membership: _____

Date membership ceased:

Reason for membership cessation:

Death

Transfer to a Nazarene church: _____

district: _____

Removal

Commendation

Release