

SEEK 2020 Initiative

Richard A. Sabuin
Retention and Reclamation Coordinator
Northern Asia-Pacific Division

A. Introduction

1. Challenge

Report of Retention and Reclamation

Church : The Shepherd SDA Church
Year : 2015
Membership (Dec 2014) : 100
Retained (Dec 2014) : 90 (90%)

Members	Factors	Number	Total
Added	Transfer	2	+
	Baptism	10	+
Deducted	Transfer	6	-
	Other	2	-
Recorded			104
Missed	Move	5	-
	Quit	12	-
Reclaimed		5	+
Retained			92 (88%)

The challenge of the SSDAC is to increase the retention rate of the church. This could be done through:

- a. Processing the membership transfer of the moving members
- b. Reclaiming the missing 12 members

2. The Task

One of the objectives of the NSD SSPM Department is to provide intentional reclamation and retention projects/initiatives in all church structural levels: local churches, local conferences/missions, and union conferences/missions, and institutions. This objective is described as SEEK 2020, which is an emphasis in adding, retaining, and reclaiming souls/members for this quinquennium until 2020.

The slogan SEEK is derived from a key word from the statement of Jesus in Luke 19:10, "For the Son of Man came to seek and to save that which was lost." The

three parallel parables of *the lost* (sheep, coin, son), inspires this theme. SEEK is an acronym representing:

Search until they are found
Encourage until they return
Empower them to serve
Keept them until Jesus comes

B. Biblical Foundation

These four components represent key concepts indicated in the three parables of Luke 15. SEEK concerns mainly on two important task of the church besides multiplying members to the church. These are **Retention** and **Reclamation** of our church members: Retain the remaining and reclaim the straying. Based on the context, Luke 15 is actually all about retention and reclamation. There is no addition of numbers in these parables. Each parable begins with a number and ends with the same figure. Of the parable of the lost sheep, it is $100 - 1 + 1 = 100$. Of the lost coin, it is $10 - 1 + 1 = 10$, and about the lost son, it is $2 - 1 + 1 = 2$. There must be a reason for Luke to include these three parables of Jesus in in a row. A brief analysis of each parable may give us some insights necessary to understand what we need to do in the SEEK initiative.

1. The Value of One Soul.

Statistically, the shepherd loses 1% of his sheep, the woman 10% of her silver coin, and the father 50% of his children. However, speaking from the value, one sheep is 100% sheep; one silver coin is 100% silver; one son is 100S% son. God values the one soul. "If you fail ninety-nine times in a hundred, but succeed in saving the one soul from ruin, you have done a noble deed for the Master's cause" (GW, 399). Also "even though but few accept the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, their work will not be in vain; for one soul is precious, very precious, in the sight of God. Christ would have died for one soul in order that that one might live through the eternal ages" (8T, 73).

2. Identifying the Lost

The shepherd knows that he loses one sheep and which sheep that is lost. There is no way of identifying this unless the shepherd always counts his sheep and knows them individually. Jesus says, "I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me" (John 10:14). In the context of a shepherd with only 100 sheep, if the shepherd knows his sheep very closely, he would know which of them is lost even without counting them one by one.

3. Reclaiming and Retaining, not Simply Adding or Multiplying.

Particularly in the parable of the lost sheep, the shepherd could have just disregarded the one lost sheep justifying that the remaining ninety-nine will soon

increase biologically. In fact, addition and multiplication can solve the problem of numbers. The shepherd may have many more than 100 sheep only in one year. However, the interest of the shepherd is not only in adding or multiplying but also in reclaiming and retaining what he has had. If the father, God, and the shepherd, Jesus Christ, is concerned with retention and reclamation, then the woman, His church and its family members, should be also.

4. Searching Far and Near.

The young son went to a “far country” that the father may not have any idea where to find. But the love of the father brought him back home. The one silver coin was lost in the house. It is very near and yet lost. For that reason, the search should be done thoroughly and carefully, although it is near but it is not noticed. There are those who are far from the church that we do not have an idea where they may be. But there are those who are near and yet we are not aware that they are lost: They stop believing some doctrines; they come to church but do not participate; they never be visited; they have problems but no one has paid attention, etc.

5. Until: Continuous Efforts.

The conjunction *heōs* “until, to the point” in the phrase “until he finds it” (Luke 15:4) indicate an ongoing, uninterrupted and intensive effort of searching until the lost sheep/coin is found. This is the manner with which the searching of the missing members is done.

6. Rejoicing: Celebration!

It is a common practice in our churches that members will warmly welcome newly baptized members after their baptism. However, the celebration in the parables of the lost is for the retention and reclamation. It is a celebration when one lost soul has returned and the number is retained. This is a component that should be included in the retention and reclamation initiatives in our church.

7. The Shepherd, The Woman, and The Father

These are the three persons who have lost something/someone. Although Jesus does not use the word *shepherd* in the parable of the lost sheep (Luke 15:4-7), at the beginning of the gospel of Luke, the idea of shepherds pastoring their flocks has been introduced (2:8). The word *poimēn* in the New Testament represents either Jesus (Matt 2:8; 25:32; John 10:11), or elders/pastors (Acts 20:28). In fact, since Jesus is called the Chief Shepherd (1Pet 5:4), then pastors of His church could be called shepherds (v. 2). The parable of the lost silver coin represent the effort made to search those who are lost in the family and yet they are not aware of their situation. Thus the woman may represent parents or family members seeking for those who are lost in their family. However in the bigger picture, the woman may also represent the church effort to search for those who are lost. In a sense, in the

New Testament woman may represent the church (Rev 12:1). At least we can understand the parable of the lost silver coin as Christ searching for the lost souls through families and through His church, thus Total Member Involvement (TMI). The parable of the lost son presents the love and compassion of the father. The father may represent God Himself who because of His love has sent Jesus Christ to die for the sinners (John 3:16). Therefore, the shepherd, the woman and the father represent a joined effort of God and His church in seeking for the lost.

8. The Sheep, The Silver Coin, and the Son

These are the three lost objects. Ellen White distinguishes the characteristics of the sheep and the coin. The lost sheep “knows that it is lost,” but the lost coin represents “those who are lost in trespasses and sins, but who have no sense of their condition” (*COL*, 193). The lost son represents “those who have once known the Father’s love, but who have allowed the tempter to lead them captive at his will” (*COL*, 198). The common denominator of these three is that they are all lost. Whether a member is aware of being lost, or does not have a sense of being lost, in the eyes of God, he/she is lost. The third parable is kind of a combination of the two. The son is aware that he is lost but at first does not have a sense of being lost, until “he came to his senses” (Luke 15:17). The fact is that whether or not the sheep, the coin, or the son realize of their being lost, the shepherd, the woman, and the father know that their precious belonging has been lost. They question is: Are we aware of those members who are lost? If we do not realize it, perhaps we are also lost!

9. To Go After; To Seek; To Run, Embrace and Kiss

These are the verbs describing the efforts of the shepherd, the woman, and the father respectively. The phrase *poreuomai epi* “to go for” in Luke 15:4 implies an action of going immediately to find the lost sheep no matter how far the distance may be. This means a sense of an immediate and total action or effort for that one single lost sheep. While the “going for” represent an initial action of searching, the verb “to seek” represents the process of searching itself. This is the case of the woman seeking her lost silver coin. In the case of the father and his lost son, his action of running to his son, embracing and kissing him (v. 20) represents the gestures or attitudes in welcoming those who are returning to the church. Thus the verbs used to describe the action of finding the lost cover the whole process of searching from the beginning to the end. The effort does not stop until the shepherd finds the lost sheep (v. 4), the woman finds the lost coin (v. 8), and the father embraces and kisses his returning lost son (v. 20). This is an imperative for the process of retention and reclamation.

10. The Adverbs and Verbal Expressions

The parables employ some adjectives modifying the actions of going, seeking, and welcoming. The shepherd goes after the lost sheep until he finds it (Luke 15:4). This represents determination. The woman lights a lamp, sweeps the house and

searches diligently until she finds it the lost coin (v. 8). When simply lighting a lamp does not work, she sweeps the house hoping that she will hear the sound of a coin moving or rolling. The adverb *epimelōs* “carefully, thoroughly” indicates that the search takes time and requires careful actions and comprehensive strategies and efforts. The father is filled with compassion (v. 20) in welcoming his lost son. He does not only feel compassion, but he shows or acts his compassion by running to his son, embracing and kissing him. Compassion is also expressed by the shepherd by putting on his shoulder the lost-but-found sheep. This should be also the spirit of our church members in their efforts of bringing back the lost and retaining the faithful.

C. Implementation of the SEEK 2020 Initiative

Some materials on retention and reclamation are available. One of them is prepared by the Sabbath School and Personal Ministries Department of the General Conference, available in its website, entitled *Keys to Reclaiming the Missing*: <http://www.sabbathschoolpersonalministries.org/assets/sspm/pmleaflets/Reclaiming%20the%20Missing.pdf>. Therefore, provision of materials is not necessarily the issue. The question is how to implement the initiatives in intentional and organized ways. SEEK 2020 is a suggestion for implementing retention and reclamation in an annual basis. This is in line with the SSPM Strategic Planning of the NSD # 9: *A yearly-cycle plan for Reclamation with a climax on a celebration on Sabbath when lost/inactive church members are re-accepted, either through baptism or profession of faith: Luke 15 concept of SEEK.*

1. Preparation

- a. *Training and promotion*: The church and its small groups and members need to be convinced that retention and reclamation is a biblical imperative, exemplified by our Lord Jesus Christ. Prayer is top priority even during training and promotion.
- b. *Heart Preparation*: Church members must prepare their hearts to welcome the lost-but-found members. They need to ask God to give them a heart of love and compassion; a heart of joy to see salvation of others. The spirit of the “faithful” brother in the parable of the lost son should be shunned. Without heart preparation of the church members, the reclaimed souls will find out that the church is even worse that it was when they left it. And once they get disappointed and leave the church for the second time, it will be much more difficult to reclaim them.
- c. *Administrative support*: The SSPM Committee (you may call this SEEK Committee) of the church recommend to the church board and the church board makes an action for support. Prayer is top priority during meetings.
- d. *Commitment Sabbath*: This is a Sabbath when the church pledges a commitment to SEEK for the souls. The commitment begins with special Sabbath School program emphasizing SEEKing for souls. Small groups make

special prayer before lesson study. A sermon on SEEK (Luke 15) could be fitting to this occasion. An appeal is given to the church members to commit themselves to Christ and to join Him SEEKing the lost.

2. Action!

S Search until they are found

- a. Searching in the books.
 - (1) Church clerk assisted by the Care Coordinators of Disciples In Action look through the church membership book record the names of those who have not come to the church for at least the last 3 months.
 - (2) The names are distributed to each DNA as the assignment for SEEK of that DNA.
- b. Searching through prayers
 - (1) Each DNA creates a prayer initiative to pray for names of the missing members
 - (2) Each Sabbath the church prays for the missing members
 - (3) Each member of the church, each family in the church pray for the missing members
- c. Searching carefully and thoroughly
 - (1) Find the address of the missing members through different ways: electronic media and social network; telephone directory (Yellow Pages); any possible ways
 - (2) Do not wait! Finding them is urgent. Once the DNA discovers the address, start the efforts of contacting them
 - (3) Searching takes time, but one soul discovered is an SOS call
- d. Searching with alertness of opportunities
 - (1) While searching for the missing members, there must be opportunities for having new contacts with non-believers. Include them in the effort of winning them for Christ
 - (2) When possible, involving them in searching for the missing members would be a point of contact for them to the mission
- e. Search far and near
 - (1) The lost ones could be children of the church members or they relative who have stopped coming to church. They are just lost in the house. Careful efforts need to be done to reach them back
 - (2) There are those that the church cannot trace their location because they just disappear and there is no information about them. Just like the lost son, these missing members know where home is. Just be prepared for them to come.

E Encourage them to return

- a. Encouraging through visitations
 - (1) Do not wait! Once you know the address, visit! There are strategies of doing visitation. Visit with love and compassion. Visit with patience and willingness to listen.
 - (2) Without telling them the purpose of your visit, they most probably know already: to bring them back to the church. So, instead of talking so much, this is the time to listen to them. A simple greetings such as “we miss you” or “how are you?” will be adequate to make them telling your what they feel
 - (3) Be aware of different reasons they left the church or stopped coming to the church. Listen!
 - (4) When first visit does not work, do not give up! The Holy Spirit is working. Make a second visit. Identify who may be the best persons/members of the church that may visit them. It may require a visit of someone who has hurt them or someone whom they have hurt!

- b. Encouraging through prayers and Bible reading
 - (1) When visiting missing church members, praying for them works more effective than asking them so many questions or explaining them theological ideas. They know already most of the fundamental beliefs of our church
 - (2) Read for them encouraging and comforting Bible texts relevant to the reason why they left the church. Choose Bible texts that presents in a direct and simple way the love of God, the hope for sinners, etc.
 - (3) Tell the missing members that the church and all the members are praying for them and longing for them to return

- c. Encouraging through special and honest attention
 - (1) Make something special for their special occasion, including their day of baptism
 - (2) Offer them an opportunity to host a small group meeting
 - (3) At this point, you may even invite them to visit other missing members

E Empower them to serve

- a. Empowering through *celebrating* their return
 - (1) Some returning members would request for re-baptism due to a great guilty feeling of their past sins. Usually this is the case of those who were disciplined by the church. In most cases, re-baptism is not necessary. However, a celebration is an imperative as exemplified by the Great Shepherd

- (2) Every year, or every six months, or even every quarter, set a date for celebrating the return of the lost-but-found members
 - (3) Celebration may include a special sermon, special musical presentation, special Sabbath meals, special prayer, special welcome-home announcement, etc. Each local church may have its unique way of celebration
- b. Empowering through re-installing them into church ministry
- (1) The church has to prepare a work in which returning members can do, and introduce them during the celebration: They should immediately be attached to a DNA (preferable the DNA that found them); tell them what sort of ministry in the church that they could be part of. Call them to the front and offer a prayer of dedication.
 - (2) A returning member who has been lost for many years may find it strange on the first Sabbath of his return. They may be considered like a new convert that has to go through a process of assimilation into the flock
 - (3) The returning members do not necessarily take a responsibility of being a church officer immediately. Service could mean being a member of a prayer team, being an interest coordinator in a DNA, etc. The bottom line is that every returning member should be given something to do immediately
- c. Empowering them by equipping them to serve
- (1) The church need to equip the returning members to do more mission activities in the church. This in a sense is like a preparation for them to be leaders in the next SEEK cycle
 - (2) The returning members need to be trained to be disciples of Christ. This discipleship training will prepare them to be leaders of the DNA.
 - (3) Trainings are to be done by all components or departments of the church. To have a Total Member Involvement, we need to implement Total Departmental Training, namely, an integrated training program involving all department of the church in all levels.
- d. Empowering them by asking them to encourage others
- (1) The reclaimed members may be the best leaders of the next SEEK effort program
 - (2) Ask them to give testimony before the church about God's love, and the situation of being far from God's love. Their testimonies may encourage those members who may have been thinking of leaving the church to not leave the church

K Keep them until Jesus returns

This is a stage in which the reclaimed members have been fully restored, assimilated, and have strong faith. In this stage, they are no longer the target of the initiative. They are the initiators and the implementers of the initiative.

- a. Keeping one another
 - (1) Love one another (John 15:17)
 - (2) Receive one another (Rom 15:7)
 - (3) Admonish one another (Rom 15:14)
 - (4) Care for one another (1Cor 12:25)
 - (5) Serve one another (Gal 5:12)
 - (6) Forgive one another (Eph 4:32)
 - (7) Bearing with one another (Col 3:13)
 - (8) Comfort one another (1Thess 4:9)
 - (9) Edify one another (1Thess 5:11)
 - (10) Minister spiritual gifts to one another (1Pet 4:10)

- b. till Jesus comes
 - (1) Be good stewards of the talents until Jesus comes (Luke 19:13)
 - (2) Proclaim the salvation till Jesus comes (1Cor 11:26)
 - (3) Be faithful till Jesus comes (Rev 2:25)

D. SEEK Time Table

A time table may be helpful, especially for the first implementation of steps 1 to 3. This is only a suggestion that could be adjusted contextually by each local church:

Time Period	Action	Expected Result
2 months	Preparation	1. The church is convinced and trained 2. The Church Board votes to elect coordinators and to implement 3. Commitment Sabbath is done
1 months	Search	Names of missing members identified and distributed to each DNA
3 months	Encourage	Visitation, contact, praying, encouragement, invitation, attention
3 months	Empower	Celebration, Reinstallation, Training, Assignment, Assimilation, Preparing for the next cycle of Retention and Reclamation with the reclaimed members as leaders
Onward	Keep	Next cycle begins with the reclaimed members as leaders; think of adding too!

E. Conclusion: An Eden Initiative

God instructed Adam and Eve to be fruitful, to multiply and fill the world (Gen 1:28). In a sense this is an instruction for growth. He then gave them another instruction to keep the garden and not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Gen

3:15-17). This is God's way of retaining them in the Garden. However, when Adam and Even fell into sin, the question God asked them was, "Where are you?" (Gen 3:9). This is a question of reclamation. Therefore, the concepts of multiplication, retention and reclamation is Biblical and have been there since the beginning. In our journey from Eden lost to Eden restored God's church is to continue doing these three things: To multiply in numbers, to retain those who are in the church, and to reclaim those who have left the church.

Extra notes:

1. Report of Retention and Reclamation (see sample above)
2. Yearend celebration to include celebrating adding, retention and reclamation
3. A time table may be helpful
4. Celebration takes place after the completion of step 2
5. Steps 3 and 4 are an assimilation process which is recommendable for treating new baptized members
6. Step 1 could be repeated during the implementation of step 3
7. This SEEK initiative should be cyclical and by itself multiplying
8. The more SEEK initiative is done, the more missing members to be found. So, the SEEK initiative should not disturb the evangelistic initiatives of the church to add more members into the flock