

First Lutheran Church

www.First-Lutheran.org

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Inactive Members

For many, many years, First Lutheran Church neglected to keep its membership rolls up-to-date. Since there were too many households to visit personally, the Congregation Council sent letters to those who did not fulfill the constitutional requirement of an active member. The Council wanted to encourage inactive members to return to worship and congregational life, so the tone of the letters were as welcoming and sensitive as possible. The Council also wanted, however, to be straightforward and clear about the issue of membership.

The following process was followed at First Lutheran Church and is shared with others in the hope that it will assist other congregations who are dealing with the “sticky” issue of inactive members and removal from membership rolls.

- A computer printout was made listing all persons who had not communed or made a contribution of record for at least one year.
- A small group of persons were chosen who knew the membership well to carefully review the list and delete the names from the inactive list of those who had unusual circumstances (college students, shut-ins, etc.).
- Church staff reviewed the remaining names. If in doubt, persons were *retained*. For example, if a wife was very active, but the husband did not attend or participate, the husband was retained as a member. The Congregation Council also reviewed the names still remaining on the inactive list.
- The Congregation Council approved the final list and sent two letters:

[Inactive Letter #1](#) (Sent to local inactive persons)

[Inactive Letter #2](#) (Sent to inactive persons who lived far away)

- During the next two months the pastor and Council responded to those who were sent letters according to feedback received.
- Two months after mailing the above letters, the Council formally removed those who had not responded and mailed an additional letter notifying them of their removal from membership.

[Inactive Letter #3](#) (Sent to all whose names were removed)

Out of over 300 letters mailed, only eight responses were received: six responded that they wanted to retain their membership, one requested a visit from the pastor, and one response was in anger.

The removal from membership is the act of acknowledging someone’s decision to remain apart from the life of the congregation; it is not “kicking someone out of the church.” It is important to assimilate new members when they are taken in through the front door, rather than deal with the improbable task of encouraging re-involvement after they have gone out the back door!