

## Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual on Transfers –

### Church Boards Cannot Grant Letters

“A church board does not have authority to vote letters of transfer or to receive members from other churches by letter. Their powers in this matter are limited to making recommendations to the church. Action on all transfers of membership, favorable or otherwise, should be taken by the church. (See pp. 35, 52.)

**Membership During Interval of Transfer** – Under no circumstances shall the clerk of the church granting the letter remove the member’s name from the church roll until the return portion of the letter has been received, certifying that the member has been voted into the fellowship of the receiving church.

To follow any other plan is to deprive the person of church membership during the interval of transfer and is a procedure which should never be followed. The clerk, the elder, the minister, and the conference/mission/field president are all responsible for seeing that the above plan is uniformly adhered to in all the churches.

- Outgoing transfers are not complete until the individual is ACCEPTED into the next church. Clerks receive notice of completed transfers on the Transfers of Membership form.

Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual; Revised 2005, 17<sup>th</sup> Edition, pg 37,

## Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual on Discipline & Removing Missing Members –

### Process of Discipline

When grievous sins are involved, the church has two ways in which disciplinary measures must be taken:

1. By a vote of censure.
2. By a vote to remove from membership.

**Discipline by Censure**—In cases where the offense is not considered by the church to be so serious as to warrant the extreme course of removing membership, the church may express its disapproval by a vote of censure. Censure has two purposes: (1) To enable the church to express its disapproval of a grievous offense that has brought disgrace upon the cause of God and (2) to impress offending members with the need for a change of life  
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and reformation of conduct and to give them a period of grace and probation

during which to make those changes.

A vote of censure is for a stated period of from a minimum of one month to a maximum of 12 months. It terminates an erring member's election or appointment to all offices and removes the privilege of election while it is in effect. Members under censure have no right to participate by voice or by vote in the affairs of the church or lead church activities, such as teaching a Sabbath school class. They are not deprived, however, of the privilege of sharing the blessings of Sabbath school, church worship, or communion. Membership may not be transferred during the period of censure. Votes of censure must not carry any provision involving removal of membership in case of failure to comply with any condition imposed. Assessment should be made at the expiration of the period of censure to determine whether the disciplined members have changed course. If their conduct is satisfactory, they may then be considered in regular standing without further action and shall be notified that the censure has ended. If their conduct is not satisfactory, the church again should consider appropriate discipline. Any return to church office must be by election.

***Discipline by Removal From Membership***—Removing individuals from membership in the church, the body of Christ, is the ultimate discipline that the church can administer. Only after the instruction given in this chapter has been followed, after counsel from the pastor or the conference when the pastor is unavailable, and after all possible efforts have been made to win and restore them to right paths, should an individual be removed from membership.

***No Additional Tests of Fellowship***—No minister, congregation, or conference has authority to establish tests of fellowship. This authority rests with the General Conference in session. Anyone seeking to apply tests other than those herein set forth does not, therefore, properly represent the Church. (See 1T 207.)

***Timeliness of Discipline***—The church must care for the disciplinary process within a reasonable time and then communicate its decisions with kindness and promptness. Delay in administering discipline may increase the frustration and suffering of the member and the church itself.

***Caution About Judging Character and Motive***—“Christ has plainly taught that those who persist in open sin must be separated from the church,  
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but He has not committed to us the work of judging character and motive. He knows our nature too well to entrust this work to us. Should we try to uproot from the church those whom we suppose to be spurious Christians, we should be sure to make mistakes. Often we regard as hopeless subjects the very ones whom Christ is drawing to Himself. Were we to deal with these souls according to our imperfect judgment, it would perhaps extinguish

their last hope. Many who think themselves Christians will at last be found wanting. Many will be in heaven who their neighbors supposed would never enter there. Man judges from appearance, but God judges the heart. The tares and the wheat are to grow together until the harvest; and the harvest is the end of probationary time. There is in the Savior's words another lesson, a lesson of wonderful forbearance and tender love. As the tares have their roots closely intertwined with those of the good grain, so false brethren in the church may be closely linked with true disciples. The real character of these pretended believers is not fully manifested. Were they to be separated from the church, others might be caused to stumble, who but for this would have remained steadfast."—COL 71, 72.

***At a Properly Called Meeting***—Members may be disciplined for sufficient cause, but only at a properly called business meeting (see pp. 123, 124) after the church board has reviewed the case. The meeting must be presided over by an ordained pastor, or licensed pastor who is ordained as a local elder of the church concerned, or, in the pastor's absence and in counsel with the pastor or with the conference president, an elder of the local church.

***By Majority Vote***—Members may be removed from membership or otherwise disciplined only by a majority vote of members present and voting at a duly called meeting. "The majority of the church is a power which should control its individual members."—5T 107.

***Church Board Cannot Remove Members***—The board may recommend to a business meeting the removal of members, but under no circumstance does the board have the right to take final action. Except in the case of the death of members, the clerk can remove a name from the records only after a vote of the church in a business meeting.

***Fundamental Rights of the Members***—Members have a fundamental right to prior notification of the disciplinary meeting and the right to be heard in their own defense, introduce evidence, and produce witnesses. No church should vote to remove a member under circumstances that deprive  
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the member of these rights. Written notice must be given at least two weeks before the meeting and include the reasons for the disciplinary hearing.

***Lawyers Not to Represent Members***—The work of the Church in its administration of order and discipline is an ecclesiastical function that in no sense has to do with civil or legal procedure. Therefore, the Church does not recognize the right of members to bring legal counsel to represent them in any meeting called to administer order or discipline or for the transaction of

any other church business. Members wanting to bring legal counsel into a meeting should be informed that they will not be given a hearing if they insist on bringing legal counsel.

The church also should exclude all nonmembers from any church meeting called for the administration of church order or discipline, except when they are called as witnesses.

***Transferring Members Under Censure***—No church shall receive into membership persons who are under censure of another congregation, because that would condone the offenses for which the members have been disciplined. The acceptance into membership of those under discipline is such a serious violation of Church policy that an offending church may be subject to discipline by the conference constituency.

***Members Not to Be Removed for Nonattendance***—Church leaders should faithfully visit absentee members and encourage them to resume attendance and to enjoy the blessings of worship with the congregation.

When because of age, infirmity, or other unavoidable cause members find it impossible to attend worship services regularly, they should keep in contact with church leaders by letter or other means. However, as long as members are loyal to the doctrines of the Church, nonattendance shall not be considered sufficient cause for removal from membership.

***Members Moving Away and Not Reporting***—When members move, they should inform the clerk or elder of their new address. While remaining members of that church, they should report and send their tithe and offerings at least quarterly. If, however, members move without leaving a forwarding address and make no effort to contact or report to the church, and the church cannot locate them for at least two years, then the church may certify that it has tried without success to locate the members and the members may be removed by a vote of the church. The clerk should record in the membership record: “Whereabouts unknown. Voted to designate as missing.”

#### ***DISCIPLINE 65***

***Members Not to Be Removed for Pecuniary Reasons***—Though members should support the work of the Church to the extent they are able, they should never be removed because of their inability or failure to contribute financially to the Church.

***Removing Members at Their Request***—Great care should be exercised in dealing with members who request to be removed from membership. Although the Church recognizes the right of members to decide whether to belong to the Church, ample time should be given such members for thought and reflection and every effort made to restore them to a satisfactory

experience.

Letters of resignation should be presented to the board, which will forward them to a business meeting. Out of Christian consideration for the individuals involved, action shall be taken without public discussion.

***Notification to Those Removed From Membership***—A church removing members must notify them in writing of the action taken but with the assurance of enduring spiritual interest and personal concern. This communication should, where possible, be delivered in person by the pastor or by a board designee. The former members should be assured that the church hopes they will return to the church and that one day there will be eternal fellowship together in the kingdom of God.

***Reinstating Those Previously Removed From Membership***—When persons have been removed, the church should, where possible, maintain contact and manifest the spirit of friendship and love, endeavoring to bring them back to the Lord.

Those previously removed may be received again into membership when the period assigned by the church in a business meeting is concluded, when confession of wrongs committed is made, evidence is given of real repentance and change of life, and the life is consistent with Church standards and it is clear that the member will fully submit to Church order and discipline. Such reinstatement should preferably be in the church from which the member was dismissed. However, when this is not possible, the church where the person is requesting reinstatement must seek information from the former church about the reasons for which the person was removed from membership.

When dealing with perpetrators of sexual abuse, it should be remembered that restoration to membership does not remove all consequences of such a serious violation. While attendance at church activities may be per-

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missible with properly established guidelines, a person convicted or disciplined for sexual abuse should not be placed in a role which could put them in contact with children, youth, and other vulnerable individuals. Neither shall they be given any position which would encourage vulnerable individuals to trust them implicitly.

Because removal from membership is the most serious form of discipline, the period of time, determined by the church business meeting, before members may be reinstated should be sufficient to demonstrate that the issues which led to removal from membership have been resolved beyond reasonable doubt. It is expected that readmission to membership will be done in connection with rebaptism.

***Right of Appeal for Reinstatement***—While it is the right of the church

to administer discipline, this does not set aside the rights of members to seek fairness. If members believe that they have been treated unfairly by the local church, or not had the right to be heard fairly, and the church is unwilling to reconsider the case or if the officers refuse to consider their applications for reinstatement, the former members have a right to appeal in writing to the church for a hearing. The church should not neglect or refuse to grant such hearings. If it does, or if the former members still feel unfairly treated by the church after the appeal, they have the right to a final appeal for a hearing to the executive committee of the conference.

If, after a full and impartial hearing, the conference committee is satisfied that an injustice has been inflicted by the church, the committee may recommend reinstatement to membership. But if membership is still refused by the church, then the conference committee may recommend membership in some other church. On the other hand, if it finds good grounds for sustaining the church in refusing to reinstate the former members, it will so record its decision.

**Church Manual p. 62-67**