

Introduction

Dear Sister in Christ and NCCW,

You've been involved with or in affiliation with NCCW for decades. Or you recently came to an event that sounded interesting in the parish bulletin—and left that event as an officer. The pandemic, aging demographics, and society's culture wars mean fewer people in the pews—and fewer women at your meetings and events. Longtime members are moving away or don't like to drive at night, and every potential new member seems to be busy with her husband, her children, her job, volunteering, and, yes, other Catholic women's groups, in-person or virtual.

You know the value of sistership in Christ through NCCW, and maybe your mother and grandmother know or knew it too. But you've run out of ideas to share that value.

In these pages, you'll find ideas for **Regaining** those whose memberships have lapsed; **Retaining** current members; and **Growing** your membership numbers. We hope you find it helpful. We're praying for each of you.

REGAIN

In the busy-ness of today, women may have overlooked their renewal notices. What can we do to let them know that they are missed? How can we meet them where they are? It comes down to one thing ... re-connecting!

1. Make sure that your renewal request has a call to action. Women today need to know the who, what, where, and when.
2. Provide a fresh approach to your meetings; use today's technology to keep your members up to date.
3. Create a QR code and publish it in your weekly bulletin that allows the women of the parish to scan, learn, and join—and rejoin!
4. Make your contact personal—consider contact with lapsed members that is hands on, face to face, and transparent.
 - a. Ask the lapsed member to give the organization a second chance.
 - b. Ask what she needs from the organization—then see if it can be provided. Be open and honest with the member; maybe some changes are needed.
 - c. If all else fails, send a Member Exit Survey; many people are more comfortable responding in this way rather than a face-to-face uncomfortable conversation. Keep it

short, with open-ended questions such as:

- i. Why did you decide not to renew your membership?
 - ii. What would have made your membership more beneficial?
 - iii. What would encourage you to re-join?
5. Offer a discount for lapsed members to re-join.

A renewal reminder should always be sent a month before the membership lapses. Once the membership has lapsed, don't wait.

The process of regaining a member is an exercise in discipline, compassion, and a willingness to communicate in potentially uncomfortable situations. As leaders, we do this, so that others may grow.

Email reminder to a lapsed member:

Dear **[First Name]**,

I want to thank you for your continued support and prayers for **[Organization Name]**. Without these, we would not be able to provide our members, our parish, and our community with the needed spiritual growth, leadership opportunities and service that we have provided for the last **[XX years]**.

Your membership lapsed on **[XX/XX/XXXX]**. But there is still time to renew to continue receiving the benefits of being a member of **[Organization Name]**. Renewal is easy. We will have a membership table [or, give them instructions on how to renew] after the Sunday Masses on **[XX/XX]**.

Please let us know if you have any questions or concerns. We are here to serve YOU!

Two weeks after the email has been sent, if no response is received, follow up with a mailed letter to provide a tangible reminder to rejoin.

Letter template:

Dear **[First Name]**,

Did you know that your membership with **[Organization]** expired on **[Date]**? It's been quite a year — and we're looking forward to many more!

The good news is there's still time to renew!

Remember, **[Organization]** values you and helps you grow in your Catholic faith in several ways, including:

- **The opportunity to attend our annual Retreat held in June[Benefit highlight]**
- **The opportunity to attend a monthly Mass given by Fr. [N] for our organization [Benefit highlight]**
- **Caring and sharing our time, talent, and treasure with those who are less fortunate [Benefit highlight]**

Please let us know if you have any questions or concerns. We're here to serve you!

Phone conversations:

If after another two weeks there is no response, try reaching out via phone. Here are two sample conversations.

Hello?

Hi Betty! This is Sally Smith from the [Organization Name]. How are you?

I am fine, just really busy right now.

I understand. Do you have just a few moments that we can talk?

Just a few. I have to leave for work in about 15 minutes.

Thank you. Work? I thought that you retired last year.

I did, but when Mike fell and broke his hip in March the medical bills just kept coming. So, I had to go back to work.

I am so sorry to hear about the accident and your financial worries. May I ask for our members to pray for you? And would it help if we put you on our meal train for a few weeks?

Yes, that would be so helpful!

*Betty, I know that your **[Organization Name]** membership lapsed when Mike had his accident...*

Yes, I am sorry, but he comes first...

Of course, he does! We have scholarships available for people who are in situations such as yours. Let me get that confidential process started so that you still receive information and news about

***[Organization Name]**. The only thing we ask is once you are back on your feet that you make a small donation so that we can continue helping other members in need. Is that okay with you?*

Yes, and thank you!

Or, if someone did not renew due to a “situation”:

Hello?

*Hi Betty! This is Sally Smith from the **[Organization Name]**. How are you?*

I am fine, just really busy right now.

I understand. Do you have just a few moments that we can talk?

Sure, but you won't talk me into rejoining. I have had it!

I am so sorry that you feel that way. May I ask what happened?

When XXX said XXXX and no one could respond or have an opinion on the project that was the straw that broke the camel's back.

Yes, I remember that meeting. There were strong opinions all around. I want you to know that we have addressed the topic with both our Spiritual Advisor and Fr. Johns. With their guidance we have found a compromise that I hope will allay your concerns.

No, I am done.

*You will be missed, and I believe that you were a valuable member of **[Organization Name]**. May I ask what would encourage you to re-join? **[Or: Why did you decide not to renew your membership? What would have made your membership more beneficial?]***

RETAIN

You look at your list of members—and realize there are a whole lot of women you haven't seen since early 2020 or before. You wonder how you'll put on this year's women's conference without volunteers for the registration table. You wonder how many women will even come.

Or maybe you have a vague recollection of a disagreement about one of your projects—or a blowup via email or in person between two members. How can you restore interest and harmony?

Do's:

- **Listen.** Listen a lot. Everyone—seasoned members and those who are newer—have God-given gifts. Find out what they are. You only do that by listening—at meetings, in one-on-one conversations, via email and text, on social media. When you do speak, have a dialogue. Find compromises.
- **Ask** members how they want to hear from you—and how often. Ask what they'd like in terms of programming and activities. Then deliver.
- **Share** NCCW's goals and programs. Your members may be unaware of all the good

information that's available! Do this not once a year, but whenever the opportunity presents itself.

- **Help** women know they belong. Sistership and being part of a community are important. Items to support that sense of belonging—such as possibly a printable membership card—could help reinforce that.
- **Reach out** to women who aren't coming to meetings/attending Mass. Your events should be a safe place. Maybe they're not comfortable attending a meeting, but they will help set up a Facebook page. Maybe they aren't going to Mass, but they will send emails about upcoming meetings.
- **Pair up.** Have a seasoned member commit to helping along a newer member—maybe talk monthly or go out to lunch. Or, match up an introvert and an extrovert. This will help bridge any “us vs. them” inclinations—and help people form new friendships.
- **Communicate!** Try new ways to engage with your members—and to build the brand of NCCW and your affiliate. Look to things like Facebook, a council website, e-mail blasts or newsletters to share news about upcoming activities. These are the

ways our younger population communicate. They also are faster and more cost-effective than snail mail, and may be regarded as less intrusive than unexpected phone calls.

Don'ts:

- Say things like: “This is the way we’ve always done it” and “We tried that and it doesn’t work.” Listen. It may be that things are different now. Or it may be that talking about what’s been suggested can turn a past failure into a current success.
- “Voluntold” members. Not everyone has to have an office (or want one!) to be valuable. If a member says she isn’t interested in being groomed for an office or more responsibility, honor that statement—and ask what she wants to do for the group, your parish, and beyond.
- Be Lot’s wife. Don’t look back. Stop comparing today’s membership and events twenty or thirty years ago, and considering lower numbers as failures. It’s time to reset our expectations—and to trust in God rather than fear failure with new approaches to meetings, conferences, and activities. Be open to grace in all forms.

GROW

Why do you belong to NCCW or an affiliate? Why should we encourage other Catholic women to belong? According to a 2020 CARA survey of 2,214 young adult men and women, 74% of respondents who were active in a Catholic group, belonged because they were “motivated by new experiences.”¹ Career development and networking companies recommend women join a women’s group at work to help women:

- Have a place they can freely share their common issues
- Network with other like-minded women
- Gain experience and mentoring opportunities
- Develop leadership skills
- Make an impact by being a part of a whole

Sound familiar? Add spirituality to the reasons above and you have exactly what you should say

¹ Robert David Sullivan November, et al. “Survey: A Third of Young Catholics Expect to Attend Mass Less Often after the Pandemic.” *America Magazine*, 16 Dec. 2021, <https://www.americamagazine.org/faith/2021/11/10/cara-survey-young-american-catholics-241803>.

about why women should belong to the National Council of Catholic Women.

Who do we say we are?

Let's clear up who we are. We are the National Council of Catholic Women. We were formed by the bishops as a way to unify our voice and mission. Our mission guides us our work and our heart by responding with a Yes, to important issues like Caring for Creation, Human Trafficking, and Walking With Moms in Need. We encourage and lift each other up through prayer, service work and mentoring.

How to solicit new members

1. Ask your parish priest to speak about the National Council of Catholic Women after the parish announcements and have women available after Mass to answer questions.
2. Invite parish women to a social gathering like a wine night, using the editable NCCW Membership Flyer on the website. Offer childcare to encourage moms to attend.
3. Have coffee with the moms in your child's faith formation class. Bring membership brochures and the free downloadable History of NCCW brochure.

4. Participate in your parish fairs and wear NCCW logo shirts, scarves or aprons.
5. Ask to have NCCW membership and History brochures inserted in your Diocesan event bags for the participants. Include the contact information for local affiliates if applicable as well as your Diocesan president's contact information.
6. Consider conducting a scholarship, essay or art contest.
7. Have an Invite One campaign. Task each member to invite one non-member to an event.
8. Create a membership packet that may include the Introduction to NCCW, a History of NCCW brochure, how to reach their local affiliate or diocesan president, the latest copy of *Catholic Woman* magazine and a Thank You card with a real signature.

Giving the gift of membership

Why not share the gift of membership with your daughter, granddaughter, the faith formation teacher in your parish, and other like-minded Catholic women?

- Gift any college student with a membership when she begins college. This will be a reminder to her of her Catholic roots and

upbringing. It will also connect her with a Catholic women's organization.

- Gift any woman for her birthday, Christmas or just because she would benefit from being united with Catholic women from across our nation and stand with them united in prayer.

Encourage other Catholic women's groups to belong to NCCW

A simple online search shows a plethora of faith-filled Catholic women's groups with worthy goals and aspirations. Encourage the leaders of groups near you to join NCCW and:

- Stand with other women and become one united voice for the Church.
- Learn the Catholic stance is on the issues nationally and locally and advocate together.
- Pray together as a family of sisters, women united by their Baptism through monthly Rosary Calls with NCCW.
- Be empowered by ideas and suggestions to increase the spirituality of your group, and receive training to enhance their leadership skills.

About the Leadership Commission

The NCCW Leadership Commission provides organization development, opportunities for training, as well as public relations resources, and publications to strengthen leadership. The 2021-22 focus was on membership.

Contact Us

The Leadership Commission would love to know if any of these ideas work for your NCCW. How else have you regained, retained and “grown” members?

Contact your Leadership Commission Chair.

