

**The church is a community of people sharing a common purpose and fellowship. We are continually growing in faith and in the knowledge of Jesus, the Son of God.**

The work of visiting church members in their homes is not restricted to professional pastors but shared by all those who have the ability.

In the church we are specifically asked to “bear one another’s burdens” (Gal. 6:12) and “encourage one another” (1 Thess. 5:11). People come to the church because they want to be cared for, challenged to grow and supported in their times of difficulty. Yet, in today’s world, they often feel the church is as impersonal and uncaring as other groups.

A church faithful to the Bible is a caring church. It is a church that plans to care for its members and visitors. It is intentional about implementing the New Testament commands to “serve one another” (Gal. 5:13) and to be “devoted to one another” (Rom. 12:10) by organizing planned ministries of visitation.

## Visitation

### Activities and Events

Although the ministry of visitation is largely carried on at the personal level, there are certain types of group activities that may be helpful:

#### *Support Group Meetings*

Meet with the pastor and/or coordinator to “debrief” and be assigned new contacts. “Debriefing” ensures that members are being cared for and may be required to discuss emotions resulting from a visit and what can be learned from it.

#### *A Sabbath School Care Class*

Some congregations have found that the best way to assist a lay visitation team is to set aside a special Sabbath School class. The class may start out by using some of its time for training and later change to a specific study of Jesus as reclaimed members are brought into the class.

#### *Scheduled Visitation Time*

Organise a “Night of Caring” or “Visitation Day” that is scheduled weekly or monthly.

#### *Small Groups*

If your congregation has an active program of small groups, these are “open doors” for new members and reclaiming missing members. When you make a referral, it is important to call the group leader and encourage them to phone and reinforce the invitation.



## THE MINISTRY OF **Visitation**

Have you been asked to serve your local church through visitation? Or perhaps you serve on a church nominating committee and wonder what visitation involves. This guide has been designed to help you understand the role of visitation within your local church.

## The Role of Visitation

Those who feel a call to this ministry:

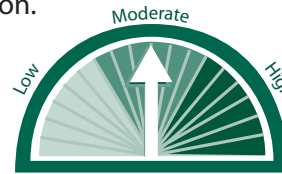
- are willing to be trained and participate in a systematic program of visitation
- communicate regularly to identify names to visit and support one another in prayer
- share skills and effective communication ideas
- observe needs and opportunities particularly in the absence of the Pastor
- make several visits to new members in the first six months to include them and support their integration into church life
- contact church visitors by telephone if they agree to build a relationship
- visit those who have stopped attending church (often they need help but do not know how to ask for it)
- visit members who are in hospital, nursing homes, terminally ill, going through divorce, have an unwanted pregnancy, have trouble with the law, have special needs, lost their job or struggling with their faith
- celebrate occasions of joy such as weddings, births, new arrivals to the community and the various stages in family life
- aim to visit every church member at least once a year (it may be simply to listen)

## Responsible to

The pastor supervises visitation and may even assign individuals to families.

## Time Commitment

- A lay visitor is usually asked to make only one or two visits a month although some will volunteer to make many more.
- A monthly meeting for the purpose of prayer and feedback may assist the group assigned to visitation.
- Approximately 2-4 hours of involvement each week.



## Term of Office

This is not an elected role but is highly valued in church life.

There is no substitute for personal visitation in the homes of the people. Research indicates that healthy, growing congregations in which the members are happy about their church experience, make visits each week equivalent to 20% of the average Sabbath attendance. That means that if the usual number of people in your church at 11 am on Sabbaths is 100, about 20 homes will be called on during the following week.

Interesting programs, good teaching and faithful attendance can never take the place of personal visiting. As Ellen White comments, "This work cannot be done by proxy., by visiting the people, talking, praying and sympathizing with them you will win hearts." (Ellen G White, Testimonies for the Church, Volume 9, page 41.)

## Skills and Spiritual Gifts

God has gifted each of us in different ways. The following gifts are valuable when considering the choice of members for the role of visitation.

- **Exhortation or encouragement:** The special ability to encourage and comfort others. It involves helping and healing, particularly for those who are bereaved, lonely or discouraged.
- **Pastor/shepherd:** To be able to carry a personal responsibility for the spiritual welfare of a group of believers, overseeing, protecting and guiding. (This gift is not limited to church pastors)

It is helpful to consult with your pastor to identify which gifts you can use to assist particular families or individuals.

