

## PASTORAL VISITATION

Home visitation is a traditional strategy for ministry. This is a tool that allows the Elders to encourage spiritual development among members of the congregation.

### 1. Preparation for a visit

What happens when the Elder/s visit/s a person/home depends largely on the preparation that occurs before that visit. This involves both the Elder and the people he is visiting. The following question will help the Elder to prepare himself for his visit:

- a. How well do you know the person you are planning to visit? What is your relationship to him/her? Will that relationship change when you come to visit as an Elder?
- b. Are you well acquainted with the story of those you are planning to visit?
- c. Are you aware of any particular stumbling blocks to spiritual growth in this person? What are the person's particular strengths and weaknesses? What is the person's sense of calling?
- d. What background factors are useful in understanding this person's spirituality? Could someone else be more helpful in guiding this person's spiritual growth?
- e. What ministry or service is the person involved with? Are there some activities that would spur him/her to further growth or that would assist the person in particular growth?
- f. The desire to get the person involved in ministry and in particular programs within the church ought not to be your primary concern.
- g. What does the person read? What courses does this person attend? How does he/she seek to mature in the faith?
- h. Does he/she have particular struggles? What could the person do to prepare for this visit? Is there a Bible passage that could be studied? Are there questions he/she could answer beforehand or that he/she could ask?

### 2. The Visit

Before walking through the door, there are certain practices that are important:

**Prayer:** Although we may prepare ourselves well, the Spirit of God can lead in new directions. All activity that is of lasting value finds its power in the Spirit of God. In prayer we seek the Lord's blessing and presence in our time together.

**Review:** We need to remind ourselves about basic facts: names, children, special circumstances, and special circumstances of the visit.

**Place:** We come as servants of the Lord to do ministry in the name of Christ, to serve God's people to the praise of God's name. our attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus (Philippians 2).

The style of the visit depends on a variety of factors:

a. The Elder: Each Elder will be comfortable with different styles. Some will be more structured while others will have no structure to follow. Each approach has its strengths and weaknesses. As servants, we need to keep in mind what will best serve those we visit. But one of the structures is: 1) Beginning with a word of prayer, 2) Reading a passage of Scripture (briefly expound it), 3) Discussing particular subjects, 4) Ending with prayer.

b. The Purpose: A crisis visit is quite different from an annual checkup visit, which is quite different from a disciplining visit.

Finally, we need to keep in mind that what can be accomplished in a single visit is limited. Neither minds nor lifestyles are likely to show dramatic changes. Our expectations ought to be realistic. Our goal is not so much immediate gains as long-term growth.

### 3. Follow-up

The success of any visit depends on follow-up. If we want to demonstrate support for a person in crisis, you need to do so, not only with words but by carrying through with more visits and expressions of concern. Follow-up is not just a nice thing to do, but an essential part of the task of an Elder.

### 4. Sample Visit Plans

#### a. Checkup Visit: Guideline 1 – Philippians 2:1-13

**Approach:** In this visit, the Elder uses a Bible study to initiate a discussion of the spiritual health of a person. Prior to the visit, the Elder requests that the person read this passage and explains that this will be the basis of some personal questions.

**Step 1:** Arrange for the visit (purpose, time, place, and length); request the reading of the passage.

**Step 2:** Greet each other. Remember, this is not a get-acquainted visit. Do not spend much time on saying *hello* (perhaps only 10 percent of the time allotted). Explain the procedure of the visit (the steps). Tell him/her that you will keep an issues sheet handy. An issues sheet is a way of recording matters that are off the current topic but to which you promise to return in this visit or the next.

**Step 3:** Begin with prayer. Read the passage together.

**Step 4:** Use the following questions:

**Open:** Who in your household, family of origin, or work eats the last cookie? Cleans the toilet? Makes coffee? Tidies up? Fixes the photocopier?

**Dig:** What was the problem in the early church? What motives are there for living in unity? What stands out about Jesus from this early hymn (He did not count equality something to be grasped, he humbled Himself, He became obedient)? What stories about Jesus reflect verses 3

and 4? What movement does this passage call us to take (not count equality, humble ourselves, be obedient)?

**Reflect:** How would things change if you consistently applied this way of living in your home? In the church? At your work? How does the attitude of Jesus Christ differ from that of a doormat?

**Step 5:** Becoming Christ-like (a mature Christian) requires that we make commitments to our growth. What commitments (one or two) can you make that would help you grow toward Christlikeness? What changes in behavior or attitude are necessary?

**Step 6:** What can I do to help you? What can the people of the church do?

**Step 7:** Return to the issues sheet. If you have time, you may discuss some of those matters. Ask if there are other matters to be discussed. Close in prayer.

**Step 8:** Write down follow-up matters and make another appointment if necessary.

**a. Checkup Visit: Guideline 2 – Luke 19:11-27**

*Approach:* In this visit, the elder uses a Bible study to initiate a discussion of the spiritual health of a person. Prior to the visit the elder requests that the person read this passage, explaining that this will be the basis for some personal questions.

*Step 1:* Arrange for the visit (purpose, time, place, and length); request the reading of the passage.

*Step 2:* Greet each other. Remember, this is not a get-acquainted visit. Do not spend much time on saying hello (perhaps only 10 percent of the time allotted). Explain the procedure of the visit (the steps). Tell him or her that you will keep an issues sheet handy. An issues sheet is a way of recording matters that are off the current topic but to which you promise to return in this visit or the next.

*Step 3:* Begin with prayer. Read the passage together.

*Step 4:* Use the following questions:

- **Open:** Why do we say, “If you want the job done, give it to a busy person?” Give examples. Whom do you admire?
- **Dig:** Who is Jesus talking to? What does the man of noble birth ask of each person? How do people respond? Is the fear of the one person legitimate? What should the person have feared? Verse 26 reveals the economy of the kingdom. What is Jesus telling those who were waiting for the kingdom?
- **Reflect:** Where do you find yourself in this story? How do you see your life as a gift? What has God given you that you can share with others?

*Step 5:* Becoming Christ-like (a mature Christian) requires that we make commitments to our growth. What commitments (one or two) can you make that would help you grow toward Christlikeness? What changes of behavior or attitude are necessary?

*Step 6:* What can I do to help you? What can the people of the church do?

*Step 7:* Return to the issues sheet. If you have time, you may discuss some of those matters. Ask if there are other matters to be discussed. Close in prayer.

*Step 8:* Write down follow-up matters and make another appointment if necessary.

### **Checkup Visit: Guideline 3—Review of the Year**

*Approach:* In this visit, the elder takes as a starting point particular events in a person's life, seeking to discern how God has moved in the past and how the Lord is calling at the present time. Prior to the visit, the elder requests that the person prepare by thinking about three significant events of this past year.

*Step 1:* Arrange for the visit (purpose, time, place, and length); request the reading of the passage.

*Step 2:* Greet each other. Remember, this is not a get-acquainted visit. Do not spend much time on saying hello (perhaps only 10 percent of the time allotted). Explain the procedure of the visit (the steps). Tell him or her that you will keep an issues sheet handy. An issues sheet is a way of recording matters that are off the current topic but to which you promise to return in this visit or the next.

*Step 3:* Begin with prayer. List the three significant events. Ask the person to tell the story of the last one of the significant events.

*Step 4:* Questions to discuss:

- What fears and anxieties did you have?
- What caused you excitement?
- What did you learn about yourself?
- What suggested that God was absent or ignoring you?
- What spoke to you of God's presence?
- Where was your biggest struggle?
- How can you sense God leading you in these struggles?
- What are some of the attitudes that helped?
- How did you experience Christlikeness at this time?

*Step 5:* Bringing in the Scripture. If you were to choose a character from a story or parable in the Scripture, which one would you choose? Why? As we meet today, where do you sense God calling you?

*Step 6:* Becoming Christlike (a mature Christian) requires that we make commitments to our growth. What commitments (one or two) can you make that would help you listen to this word from the Lord? What changes in behavior or attitude are necessary?

*Step 7:* What can I do to help you? What can the people of the church do?

*Step 8:* Return to the issues sheet. If you have time, you may discuss some of those matters. Ask if there are other matters to be discussed. Close in prayer.

*Step 9:* Write down follow-up matters and make another appointment if necessary.

### **Family Visit: Guideline 1—For a Family with Young Children**

*Approach:* In this visit the elder arranges to have the entire family together. The elder begins by reading together one of the latest stories the family has read from the children's Bible. Discussion focuses on what the children are learning.

*Step 1:* Arrange for the visit (purpose, time, place, length). Ask the family to prepare a list of ten items they believe are important for Christian living.

*Step 2:* Greet each other. Remember to greet each child by name. Make each child comfortable with you. (Take a candy or a small toy along if you want to.) Do not spend more than 10 percent of your time in getting comfortable. Explain the procedure of the visit. Tell them you will keep an issues sheet handy to allow you to record matters that require further reflection at the end of the visit or in another visit.

*Step 3:* Pray. Read the children's story Bible. First, ask factual questions: Did they understand the story? You may find that you need to retell the story in your own words. Then ask reflective questions: "I wonder what it would be like to be David?" Finally, ask listening questions: "What is God saying to us?" "If God were to sit in this room and join us in this conversation, what would he pay attention to and say to us?"

*Step 4:* Read the list of ten items important for Christian living prepared beforehand by the family. If this has not been done, take the time to do so now. Look at the list. What's missing? How does the family seek to work this out in family life? Be very pragmatic. What exactly are they doing? If helping others is important, how do they help others?

*Step 5:* Making commitments is an important way of growing as a Christian. What commitments do they believe God is calling them toward at this time?

*Step 6:* How can I help you? How can the church help you in your Christian growth?

*Step 7:* Return to the issues sheet. If you have time, discuss some of these. Add others if necessary. If there are some matters yet to be discussed, arrange for a special meeting. Close in prayer.

*Step 8:* Write down follow-up items.

### **Family Visit: Guideline 2—For a Family with Teens**

*Approach:* In this visit the elder arranges to have the entire family together. Discussion focuses on how the children (especially teens) are making personal commitments.

*Step 1:* Arrange for the visit (purpose, time, place, length).

*Step 2:* Greet each other. Remember to greet each person by name. Do not spend more than 10 percent of your time getting comfortable. Explain the procedure of the visit. Tell them you will keep an issues sheet handy to allow you to record matters that require further reflection at the end of the visit or in another visit.

*Step 3:* Read Ephesians 4:17-5:2.

- **Open:** At what age did your parents let you start choosing what you wore? (Ask Mom or Dad first.) Think about different outfits. What do they tell you about the person? What image do they project? Do clothes make a person?
- **Dig:** Identity is important for everyone. According to this passage, what is our identity? Who are we to imitate? What do the phrases “put off” and “put on” entail? What attitudes are we to have as Christians? When does anger get bad? When does a joke go wrong? When does talking about people become slander? When does having a good time become debauchery? When does making money become greed? What advice does Paul give to help keep us on track? (Don’t be partners with immoral persons [Ephesians 5:7], talk to build up, don’t let the sun go down on your anger.)
- **Reflect:** When you think of your personal identity, how does Jesus fit in? Do you believe? If a teen has not made a profession of faith, we ought to ask about personal commitment. Perhaps sharing your own story of coming to faith would be helpful to teens. Is Jesus someone you look up to? Or are you trying to become like a sports or music star?

*Step 4:* Making commitments is an important way of growing as a Christian. What commitments do you believe God is calling you toward at this time?

*Step 5:* How can I help you? How can the church help you in your Christian growth?

*Step 6:* Return to the issues sheet. If you have time, discuss some of these. Add others if necessary. If there are some matters yet to be discussed, arrange for a special meeting. Close in prayer.

*Step 7:* Write down follow-up items.

## **Group Discussion: Spiritual Growth**

*Step 1:* Read Philippians 2:1-13. Lead in an opening prayer.

*Step 2:* Remember what it was like to be a teenager. Here are some questions that can help you think about your life as a teenager:

- What music did you listen to?
- What clothes did you wear?
- How would you rate your self-esteem?
- How influenced were you by your peers?
- What made “old people” seem “old”?

*Step 3:* Looking at the Christian disciplines, what do you think is different now? The Christian disciplines include prayer, Scripture reading, meditation, study, worship, service, celebration, simplicity, and obedience. (Time will not allow a discussion of all of these.)

- How regularly did you practice the discipline?
- Was it out of habit then? Is it now?
- How does the discipline help you meet God?
- How do you experience God leading you?

*Step 4:* Give an example of how God has lead you in the past year. How does this help you be more Christ-like? How can it lead you toward maturity?

*Step 5:* In this coming year, what will you do to grow in Christian maturity?

*Step 6:* Share some items for common prayer. Choose a person to begin the prayer and another to close. Take a few minutes to pray together, allowing time for everyone who wishes to participate.

## **Group Discussion: Seven Deadly Sins**

*Step 1:* Read Psalm 51. Lead in an opening prayer.

*Step 2:* The subject for the evening is spiritual growth. Spiritual growth includes at least the following thoughts:

- It is a movement toward maturity in Christ.
- It is a movement toward Christlikeness.
- It is enabled by the work of the Spirit.
- It calls me to act in harmony with God’s guidance.

*Step 3:* Read Philippians 2:12-13. How is God leading you (me) to maturity?

*Step 4:* Divide a newspaper and/or magazines among the group. Find examples of the seven deadly sins (greed, envy, sloth, pride, lust, gluttony, and anger) as expressed in the media.

*Step 5:* Listen to Scripture (take the log out of your own eye). In what ways do we find the seven deadly sins come to expression in the church?

*Step 6:* Remember what it was like to be a teenager. Here are some questions that can help you think about your life as a teenager:

- What music did you listen to?
- What clothes did you wear?
- How would you rate your self-esteem?
- How influenced were you by your peers?
- What made “old people” seem “old”?
- How did your parents try to nurture you?

*Step 7:* Looking at the seven deadly sins, what do you believe is the difference between then and now? (Time will not allow a discussion of all of these.)

*Step 8:* Confession of sin is often very routine. How can we make confession (I did it) and contrition (I am sorry) a more meaningful part of our lives?

*Step 9:* Psalm 51 calls us to pray, “Create in me a clean heart, O Lord.” What steps can a Christian take to develop “clean” thoughts in a world that promotes “unclean” thoughts?