

Pastoral Visitation

A shepherd is one who cares for sheep and the term is used metaphorically of 'pastors'. The pastor's task is not only to guide the sheep, but to protect them as well as feed them. It is important therefore, that pastors know those under their care and this is best done through visiting. The larger the church the more difficult it is for the senior pastor to find time for visiting. Other people can help as required.

Reasons for visiting

1. To get to know the people better; their joys, struggles, family members.
2. For them to get to know us better. This helps to demystify our position.
3. To help in communication about the church. They can ask questions about the work of the church or any other matter that is on their mind. Effective communication is very important.
4. To deal with any spiritual problems that they may be struggling with.
5. To pray for them and to share any word from the Lord which may be relevant.

Hospital visitation

1. If you visit outside visiting hours, check with the staff that it is alright for you to visit.
2. Sit in a place where the patient can see you without having to shift their position.
3. If the patient looks terrible, do not show shock at their condition.
4. Listen well. Do not be afraid of silence. Let them express their true feelings. Do not just talk about yourself.
5. Show some sympathy, but do not overdo it.
6. Do not join in criticism of the nurses or doctors. Most of them do their best, and sometimes there are two sides to the story.
7. If they ask you to pass on a message, never forget to do so.
8. Be prepared to pray for them and to read Scripture. Most people are very open to this.

General visiting

1. Pray for guidance and wisdom before you make the visit. They must not be just a name to cross off the list as having been visited.
2. Avoid intimate and frequent visits of people of the opposite sex. If these visits are necessary, take your spouse with you.
3. Observe their body language. Are they at ease with you? If they are not, seek to make them so.
4. Let them express their doubts and fears without fear of your judgement. Be kind. Listen very well.
5. Do not be a 'know all' and have an answer for everything. Life at times is a mystery. Even Scripture is not clear about all matters.
6. Confidentiality is very important. Never pass on to another person what is intended to stay with you. On the other hand, never be trapped into swearing confidentiality if it is unwise for you to do so. For example, a person may need professional help because they are intending to commit suicide.

Points to note

1. If you say you are going to pop in and visit, keep to your word. Older people living alone will be continually expectant of your arrival until you come and others will be most annoyed if they stay home especially, and you do not turn up.
2. Do not just visit your favourite people and neglect others. New people within a church particularly need a visit from you as soon as possible. Even those difficult folk once visited are generally easier to get on with, if they are not neglected.
3. Keep a record of all visits and the month in which they were made. Checking these records throughout the year will ensure all the people are being visited by someone.