

Pastoral Visitation

A shepherd cares for sheep, and in this context the term is used metaphorically for pastors. A pastor's role is not only to guide the flock, but also to protect and nourish it. Pastors therefore need to know those in their care, and visiting is one of the best ways to do this. In larger churches, however, senior pastors may find it difficult to make time for regular visits, so others may need to assist as necessary.

Reasons for visiting

1. To know people better—their joys, struggles, and family circumstances.
2. For them to get to know us as pastors. 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. For example, what is the church's attitude toward LGBT? (There are extended ways of referring to this lifestyle). 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 and listen well. 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 to someone, 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 particularly in a smaller church.

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 although this is seldom done today. 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.