

Appendix A: possible themes

Each year the consistory decides upon a theme for the home visit season. The following is a number of suggested themes. The first is given in an outline form as a guide for the actual home visit. The other themes are an example of what the congregation could receive in the bulletin for their personal and family preparation.

Each theme shows that there is a great deal of flexibility possible in the approach taken from year to year. Please keep in mind that the following themes are only suggestions which are meant to help you on: your way. An elder should not feel bound to follow a theme to the letter. Everyone has his own approach. A different theme each year allows you to concentrate on different questions.

Theme A: Living by the doctrines of Scripture

The visit begins with reading Titus 2 and a prayer asking the Lord to bless the visit. The elder who leads gives a short introduction to the passage of Scripture and works through it with the following guideline.

Living by the doctrines of Scripture is a theme that comes out very clearly in Titus 2. Paul is deeply concerned that the churches follow the pattern of sound doctrine. They must avoid false doctrine (chapter 1) and live sound doctrine (chapter 2). This appears to be a difficult topic but it is the foundation of daily living.

Questions for Adults

- When you publicly professed your faith the very first question you answered was, “Do you wholeheartedly believe the doctrine of the Word of God, summarized in the confessions and taught here in this Christian church? Do you promise by the grace of God steadfastly to continue in this doctrine in life and death, rejecting all heresies and errors conflicting with God’s Word?”
 - In the light of what we read how do you continue in this doctrine (living the teachings of Scripture)?
 - Are these words as meaningful for you today as they were when you made your vows? In which way?
 - What gives you the assurance that what the Bible teaches is true for you?
- Do you stay familiar with the kind of teachings that may threaten the church today? How much do you read and what kind of books do you read?
- How do you equip yourself so that you are able to speak with others about what you believe?
- Do you find comfort in the doctrines of Scripture? What ultimately is it that gives you this comfort?
- When is the last time you read and studied the Three Forms of Unity and in particular the Belgic Confession and the Canons of Dort? What are some of the ways in which you stay familiar

with the doctrines of Scripture (At this point, you may want to advise the members to read through the Belgic Confession and the Canons of Dort, article by article, during family or personal devotions. Remind them that these documents are filled with comfort and direction.)

- Paul makes clear that we “adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour” by living a life pleasing to the Lord. To adorn is to “make beautiful.” How can we live a life that reflects what we believe (examples: speaking about the weather in the context of God’s providence; humility in our attitude toward others because we live by the grace of God.)
- Within the context of Titus 2:2-10 can you give examples of how you as a child of the Lord are able to adorn doctrine in your task as an older man or woman; as a younger man or woman? What do you see as being your place in the church and in the world?
- Scripture makes clear that we have a task to be of assistance to others in the church. How do you go about fulfilling your role in this? (Spiritual talk, being an example, giving encouragement to others, providing direction in word and deed)
- How can you show in your daily work what the doctrines of Scripture mean to you? (Showing that the love of Christ controls you)
- The teachings of Holy Scripture direct us to know the living God. The apostle Paul does so as well in Titus 2. In the verses 11-14 he gives us the reason why we need to be firm in sound doctrine: we need to know Jesus Christ and the power of his redeeming work.
 - Paul speaks of “awaiting our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ.” What does it mean to you that Jesus Christ is your Saviour and Lord? Do you look forward to his return? How does that determine the manner in which you go about your daily task?
 - Christ gave himself to redeem us from all iniquity. Do you seek forgiveness of all your sins in Christ and find your life in the blood of his cross? Do you show a Christ-like

attitude in your willingness to forgive others? How does it comfort you to know that Christ “redeems you from all iniquity?”

- Verse 14 also states the reason why Jesus died, “to purify for himself a people of his own who are zealous for good deeds.” The Lord Jesus Christ redeems and restores life so that we walk in the new obedience. What does “being zealous for good deeds” mean to you? Can others see in your daily conduct that you believe the Holy Spirit changes you? Do they see fruits of thankfulness?
- The Holy Spirit is the source of our faith. Do you understand how the preaching is used by the Spirit through which we receive the grace of God? What effect does the preaching of the Word have on your daily life? Do you take note of what the Lord is saying and let your life be shaped by what is said? How do you react if the preaching convicts you?
- We are purified through the process of conversion. Do you truly hate sin, detest and humble yourself before God? How do you flee from sin? Do you delight in God’s law?
- The Holy Spirit strengthens faith by the sacraments. What do you do to prepare yourself for the celebration of the Lord’s Supper? What does self-examination mean for you? Does the Lord’s Supper truly benefit you? In which way?

Additional Questions for parents:

- You promised at baptism “to instruct your child and to have him or her instructed to the utmost of your power.” How are you fulfilling what you vowed to do? How do you teach your children to know the Lord as their covenant God? Do you speak to them about what it means to be covenant children and about the seriousness of breaking the covenant?
- Do you as father and mother know what your children are reading, watching and learning at school?
- How do you teach your children to discern between truth and falsehood? Do you speak about the significance of baptism with your children? Do you know what your children are learning in catechism? Do you talk with them about why they need to go?

Questions for children

- Why is it important that you know your doctrines? Do you understand why you need to go to catechism and are you able to use what you have learned?
- How do you talk to someone if they want to know more about what you believe?
- What does it mean for you that you have been baptized? How does it show that you live the doctrine of your baptism?
- The children can also be asked, in a simplified form, the questions that you direct at their parents.

Questions for fellow office-bearers

- Titus 1:9, *“he must hold firm to the sure word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to confute those who contradict it.”* “How do you fulfil this task that is given to you by the Lord?”
- Titus 2: 1, *“But as for you, teach what befits sound doctrine.”* As men who are endowed with the Holy Spirit do you see the importance of passing on what the Lord has given to you?

The visit concludes with an opportunity for further questions, matters in which the family or individual may need counsel, the singing of Psalm 119:41 or Psalm 25:2, and by calling upon the name of the Lord in prayer.

Theme B: Living for One Another

In this theme the congregation is given an outline of texts. These texts in themselves give a great deal of food for thought. A passage such as Colossians 3 is a suitable reading since it uses the phrase “one another.” It also directs the congregation to the basis of “living for one another.” Paul states in Colossians 3:3, *“For you have died, and your life is hid with Christ in God.”* The visit may begin with a lead-off question pertaining to the meaning of a life which is “hid with Christ in God” and by directing the congregation to the instances in which “one another” is used in the passage.

The concept of living for one another is foreign to the sinful heart of man. By nature every person looks to his own interests and lives by the slogan “what’s in it for me.” The church of Christ must constantly ward off individualism and the idea that we have little to do with each other beyond our Sunday worship. Right from the moment they are old enough to learn children must be taught to think of the task they have within the communion of saints.

Since this is a constant battle, the Lord keeps reminding us of our mutual task within the community of believers where we are members. The Heidelberg Catechism summarizes it this way in Lord’s Day 21, “...everyone is duty-bound to use his gifts readily and cheerfully for the benefit and well-being of the other members.”

There are a great variety of texts that help us in this regard. Think about these texts and consider how you are able to fulfil what the Lord requires of you.

Texts of Scripture

- Romans 12:10, 16, *“...love one another with brotherly affection; outdo one another in showing honour. Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; never be conceited.”*
- Romans 14:13, *“Then let us no more pass judgment on one another, but rather decide never to put a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of a brother.”*
- Romans 15:5,7, *“May the God of steadfastness and encouragement*

grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus. Welcome one another, therefore, as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God.”

- Romans 15:14, *“I myself am satisfied about you, my brethren, that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, and able to instruct one another.”*
- 1 Corinthians 12:25, *“...that there may be no discord in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another.”*
- Galatians 5:13, *“For you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love be servants of one another.”*
- Galatians 6:2, *“Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ.”*
- Ephesians 4:2, *“...with all lowliness and meekness, with patience, forbearing one another in love...”*
- Ephesians 4:32, *“...and be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.”*
- Ephesians 5:19, *“...addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with all your heart.”*
- Ephesians 5:21, *“Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ.”*
- Colossians 3:9, *“Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old nature with its practices...”*
- Colossians 3: 13,16, *“...forbearing one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly, teach and admonish one another in all wisdom, and sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs with thankfulness in your hearts to God.”*
- 1 Thessalonians 4:18, *“Therefore comfort one another with these words.”*
- 1 Thessalonians 5:11, *“Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing.”*
- Hebrews 3: 13, *“But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called “today,” that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.”*
- Hebrews 10:24,25, *“...and let us consider how to stir up one another*

to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.”

- James 5:16, *“Therefore confess your sin to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed.”*
- 1 Peter 1:22, *“Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere love of the brethren, love one another earnestly from the heart.”*
- 1 Peter 4:8,9, 10 *“Above all hold unfailing your love for one another, since love covers a multitude of sins. Practice hospitality ungrudgingly to one another. As each has received a gift, employ it for one another, as good stewards of God’s varied grace...”*
- 1 Peter 5:5, *“Likewise you that are younger be subject to the elders. Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for ‘God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.’ ”*
- 1 John 4:7, *“Beloved, let us love one another; for love is of God, and he who loves is born of God and knows God.”*

Theme C: Discipline

Hebrews 12 is a passage of Scripture which works well with this theme. The passage begins by urging God's people to run the race of faith. Running involves training and self-discipline.

The word "discipline" comes from a root verb meaning "to teach." 1 Timothy 4:7 tells us that discipline is the secret of godliness.

Discipline through the preaching of the gospel

- What does the preaching do for you in your daily walk of life?
- How do you apply what you have learned?
- Do you talk about the preaching with your children, summarizing in a simple way what the message was?

Mutual discipline

- How do you help others in serving the Lord? Are you sensitive to their needs and difficulties? Do you ever feel you have a right to "punish" someone after they have apologized and asked for forgiveness? If you have some misgivings about the actions or thinking of an individual would you talk to him about it or would you simply let him feel your displeasure by giving him the cold shoulder?
- Are you familiar with the Biblical directives for correcting a sinner? When you disagree with the actions of a brother or sister, do you follow the path of Matthew 18? Would you accept the correction of a brother or sister in the Lord?

Self-discipline

- Self-discipline means taking up our cross and following Christ. Are you willing to give up everything, including your personal pleasures for Christ's sake?
- Self-discipline is a constant practice in obeying the revealed will of God and in training ourselves in godliness. The Canons of Dort Chapter V Article 2 speaks about the "holy exercises of godliness."

Discipline and your public profession of faith

- You promised to submit to the discipline of the church. What does this mean for you?

Discipline in the church

- Do you submit yourself to the authority of those whom the Lord has placed over you? Do you set an example in showing respect for the ministry of the church?
- Do you understand what it means to submit to the discipline of the church?

Discipline and the family

- What do you do to maintain peace and harmony within the home? How do you do this as parents and as children?
- How do you teach the children what the Lord requires (Deut 6:1-9)?
- What are your goals in training?
- What are some of the things that need to be done to keep your discipline focused?
- How are you as father fulfilling your task according to what is written in Ephesians 6:4?
- How do you punish your children? How do you know what is the right standard?

Questions for the children

- Do you heed the discipline of your parents and of others who are set in authority over you? Why do you have to do this?
- Your parents have many weaknesses and shortcomings? Do you have a right to disobey them if you feel they are not being fair?
- How would you complete this sentence: “What my Dad and Mom wants most for me is....”

Texts to consider

- Matthew 18 (which talks about self, mutual and church discipline) Hebrews 12; Revelation 3:19. The book of Proverbs gives many practical examples of how we are to discipline children in the path they should follow.

Theme D: The Communion of Saints

This theme is based on 1 Corinthians 12:25, “...that the members may have the same care for one another.” It can be used in conjunction with the theme “Living for one another” or as an entirely separate theme. Since the points that are covered here are similar to that in the theme “Living for one another” you would not run these themes in consecutive seasons. It is also a theme that could be used by the deacons in their visits (see Appendix C).

Texts of Scripture:

Psalm 133; Acts 2:44-47; Acts 4:32-37; Romans 12:3-13;
1 Corinthians 12; 1 Corinthians 13; Philippians 2:1-13

Further references:

Lord’s Day 21 Q&A 55

Form for the Celebration of the Lord’s Supper

Possible points to cover

- How do you go about caring for each other in the communion of saints? Is this something that is high on your mind?
- The Lord’s Supper Form says, “For the sake of Christ, who so exceedingly loved us first, we shall now love one another, and shall show this to one another not just in words but also in deeds.” How are you doing that?
- What do you understand by the terms “gifts” and “talents?” Do you use what God has given you for the well-being of the church?
- The work that is done by the office-bearers is often very demanding and difficult. Do you express appreciation to your deacons, elders and minister that you are thankful to the Lord for the work they do in faithful service (Think of how the apostle Paul encouraged those who laboured in the gospel and was supported by others)?
- Voluntary Contributions: giving according to the measure of our blessings so that the work of the ministry of the gospel can go on and the communion of saints can function properly.

- Caring for one another in the family
 - husbands and wives
 - parents and children
 - children to children.
- Are those who are widowed or alone receiving proper care? Are they contributing according to their talents?
- Are social visits Christ-centred? Do you think about praying with one another even after an evening of being together and having fun? This will also help determine proper Christian behaviour.
- Philippians 2:2 speaks about “...*being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind.*” What are some ways this can be exercised effectively?

Theme E: Worship

The second commandment requires that we worship the Lord in no other manner than he has commanded in his Word. The Bible is the norm for all of life. All our adoration and worship of God is determined by the covenant relationship he has established with us.

Coming into the assembly of God's people is an act of faith and should be anticipated as the highlight of the week, as a time to sing and rejoice, to pray, and to hear the preaching of the Word. The worship service provides us with the means to fulfil the demands of a holy God and it grants spiritual enrichment for growth in the Lord. Worship isn't to be confused with entertainment. Gathered together in worship we honour the Lord and give him the praise that is due to his name. As people of God we bow before the living God, acknowledging we are sinners in need of mercy and grace.

There are many indications in the Bible of the importance of worship. For example, the author of Psalm 29:2 calls us to "*Ascribe to the LORD the glory due to his name; worship the LORD in the splendour of his holiness.*" Psalm 95:6,7 invites us to unite in worship with God's people when it says, "*Come, let us bow down in worship, let us kneel before the Lord our Maker; for he is our God and we are the people of his pasture, the flock under his care.*"

Our worship on earth brings us in contact with heaven and knits us together with the angels and the redeemed who are gathered around the throne of God (Revelation 4 & 5). True worship gives us access to our heavenly Father, by the Spirit and through the Son (Ephesians 2: 18).

Covenant worship is the key to a life of thankfulness. It also sets the tone of our liturgy. Furthermore, we confess in Article 7 of the Belgic Confession, "We believe that this Holy Scripture fully contains the will of God and that all that man must believe in order to be saved is sufficiently taught therein. The whole manner of worship which God requires of us is written in it at length."

Public Worship

- Every Lord's Day the congregation comes together to worship the Lord in the beauty of his holiness (Psalm 96). How do you prepare yourself for this meeting between the Lord and his people? Do you pray for the ministry of the gospel during the course of the week?
- Is going to church a highlight for you? In which way?
 - Why do you think the Bible puts so much emphasis on the preaching of the Word?
 - How do you work on getting the most out of the preaching? (Getting enough sleep beforehand, taking notes, listening to it again, discussing it afterward, etc.)
 - How do you know that you are serving the Lord according to his Word?
- What strength do you receive from the administration of holy baptism and the Lord's Supper celebration? Do you know the significance of each of the elements of the worship service? Do you understand the sacraments to be, in the first place, signs and seals that were given for the benefit of the congregation?
- The fourth commandment requires that we "Keep the Sabbath day holy." What kind of standard do you use to determine what you and your children are allowed to do when you are not in church? How would you apply Isaiah 58:13,14 in this regard?
- In Lord's Day 38 we confess that maintaining the ministry of the gospel and the schools is part of our worship of the Lord. How do you determine what you should be giving for Voluntary Contributions?
- In 1 Timothy 2 Paul requires that men in public worship should lift holy hands without anger and quarreling. Do you make sure that you are able to worship the Lord without having sin on your conscience? Do you also make sure that disputes are cleared up before you come to church?
- In 1 Timothy 2 we are also told about how we are to come to the worship services in clothing that reflects that we are worshipping the Lord in the beauty of his holiness. Do you consider before you go to church whether you are dressed appropriately?

Family Worship

- How do you worship the Lord as family? Do you take time to read and discuss the Bible together?
- Do you sing a psalm or hymn at the dinner table (memory work of the children)?
- Do you allow for a time where questions can be asked and discussed?
- How do you fulfil your task as father and mother in the home?
- Are spiritual matters discussed within the home and are the sermons reviewed in view of growing in the ways of the Lord?

“Business” Worship

- There are businesses where the employer and many of the employees are Christian. The elders should encourage these men to have a suitable time (perhaps once a week) where they take time to meditate on a passage of Scripture and pray together.

Individual Worship

- Do you take the time for personal devotions? When do you do this? How do you go about your study of Scripture? (As elders you may want to stress the great benefit of beginning the day with devotions.)
- Do you encourage your children to have their own time for devotions?
- What do you do when you are away from home, on the job site, in a restaurant or at school?

Suggested Texts

- Exodus 31; Deut. 12-13; 15:1-16:17; Psalm 92; Psalm 95; John 4:1-42; Hebrews 4:1-13

Theme F: Fulfilling our Vows

The matter of fulfilling our vows can be discussed in the context of keeping our promises. Children are to be trained in this as they grow up and take on more responsibilities. Here is also an opportunity to speak about how the Lord is always faithful in fulfilling what he promised to do. Therefore we can rely on him and believe he will come to our help and aid even when we least expect it.

This theme allows you to review the questions that were asked at public profession of faith, baptism, marriage and the ordination of office-bearers.

Public Profession of faith

- Do you think about what you said when you professed your faith before the congregation? How do you carry this out in a practical manner?
- What does it mean to commit your whole life to the Lord's service? How are you able to do that?
- What does it mean to be a living member of Christ's Church?
- Do you speak with your children about the necessity and privilege of professing your faith?

Marriage

- What does it mean to love and to be true to each other always? Are you as a husband truly concerned about the spiritual well-being of your wife and children? Are you as a wife submissive to your husband? Do you understand what that entails?
- What do you expect of your spouse and of yourself in marriage? Are these expectations biblical?
- When your wedding banns were announced, it was said that you desire to begin your marriage in the name of the Lord and to complete it to his glory. How do you seek to use your marriage for the Lord's glory?
- Do you still feel as enthusiastic about what you promised when you made your wedding vows? How are conflicts resolved?

Baptism

- You promised to instruct and to have your children instructed in the doctrine of salvation to the utmost of your power. What are you doing to make sure this is getting done? What is your involvement in the education of your children? Do you know what they are being taught at school and in catechism classes?
- Do you fulfil what you promised to do in your respective roles as father and mother? Are you as father aware of what it means that you are the head of the family and what kind of leadership this entails? Do you as parents pray for the children (also in their struggles as teenagers) both privately and in their hearing? Are you as mother aware of your task and influence in the family?
- Do you make sure good Christian literature is available to your children?

Texts regarding vows

- Genesis 28:22; Leviticus 7:16; Leviticus 22: 18-22; Numbers 6:2; Numbers 15:3; Numbers 30:2; Deuteronomy 23:21.22; 1 Samuel 1:11; Psalm 76:11; Psalm 116; Ecclesiastes 5:1-6

Theme G: Prayer

Within this theme the elders may make use of the Lord's Prayer, with the explanation and proof texts as found in the Lord's Days 45-52 of the Heidelberg Catechism. Prayer is the most important part of our life of thankfulness to the Lord. It is good to find out whether the father shows leadership in prayer and the family has a regular routine of prayer.

General

- Is prayer a regular part of your daily schedule? How do you know that your prayers are pleasing to the Lord? (Lord's Day 45 Q&A 117) Do you accompany prayer with Bible reading?
- Do husbands and wives pray together? Does the father show himself to be a leader in prayer? How do you go about teaching your children to pray?
- Do you ever make use of the form prayers in the Book of Praise?

The Lord 's Prayer as our Guide

The Address of Prayer

- Do you take comfort in the fact that you are permitted to address the Lord as your Father? How do you show that you honour and respect the Lord in your manner of praying?

First petition

- What does it mean to rightly know the Lord? How do you direct your whole life – thoughts, words and actions – that the name of the Lord is always honoured and praised? Do you read books that help you understand who the Lord is? Why would it be important for you to attend Bible Study with fellow members of the congregation? Isn't personal study sufficient? How do you praise and honour the Lord in your family life and in your personal life?

Second petition

- What does it mean for you to be ruled by the Word and Spirit of the Lord? How would this include the use of media and entertainment and the use of your time?

- How can you truly seek the furtherance of God’s kingdom and the well-being of the church? Do you pray for the return of the Lord Jesus Christ?

Third petition

- Do you think of the prayer “Thy will be done” in terms of denying your own will? Do you accept what the Bible requires of you without murmuring and complaining?
- How do you fulfil the duties of your office and calling in being single, married or when confronted with illness or even death?
- Do you pray for others in the church and seek out those who need you? Do you as a single member see how you can be used to assist the ministry of the gospel?
- For students in college and university you may want to ask them how they see their studies in view of the office and calling the Lord has given to them.

Fourth petition

- Do you indeed pray and work in the knowledge that all your cares and labour cannot do you any good without God’s blessing?
- How is it shown in your life that you place all your confidence and trust in the Lord alone?
- How do you show to your children and fellow workers that you cannot live by bread alone but by every Word that proceeds from the mouth of the Lord?
- What do you do with the money you earn? Do you use it in the Lord’s service?

Fifth petition

- Do you seek forgiveness of your sins in the Lord Jesus Christ? Do you believe that your sins are truly forgiven you? Do you ask the Lord to deal with specific sins in your life?
- Knowing the grace the Lord has shown you, do you have it in your heart to forgive those who sin against you? Do you make it clear in word and deed that the sin is truly forgiven and that you will now walk together the road of reconciliation and renewal?

- Are you able to confess sins you are struggling with to others (James 5:14-16) so that they can pray with you and help you break the sinful pattern? If someone comes to you for help do you show compassion and love?

Sixth petition

- Do you recognize that only in the Lord and in his Word you will find the power to resist temptation? Ponder on how the words of Psalm 101:3 and Philippians 4:8 can help you resist the power of temptation. How would these texts affect, for example, what we watch on Television or download off the Internet?
- Do you make sure that as one who prays “lead us not into temptation” you are not causing a brother or sister in the Lord to stumble by your behaviour, gestures, words or by what you wear?
- How do you think we could be in danger of underestimating the power of Satan, this world and our own sinful flesh?
- How can we be upheld and strengthened by the power of the Holy Spirit?