

The Visit

It should be clear from the manner in which you arrive at the door of members that you are on official business. Avoid being casual in your dress or in your approach. Greet the brothers and sisters with a handshake of communion (1 Corinthians 16:20). Wait to be invited in and offered a seat. Do not come across as presumptuous, insolent or bold.

When the home visit begins, one of the most difficult but also the most beautiful tasks of an elder commences. The visit should begin with a short prayer and the reading of a passage of Scripture that relates to the theme which will be discussed.

It is important that you formulate your questions clearly and to the point. You must work at keeping everyone involved in what is being discussed whether a question is being directed at him or not. As a rule try to avoid questions which can be answered with a simple “yes” or “no.” Questions such as “Do you have any complaints about the consistory or minister?” or “How do you like the minister?” are not in place. They can encourage negativism.

If criticism is voiced, do not accept sweeping statements. Let those who voice criticism be specific with examples. Let them also come with positive suggestions as to how the situation could be improved. The home visit is not a time for members to voice their complaints. On the other hand, do not give the impression that you don't want to hear legitimate points of concern.

The visitors must keep the visit focused and not allow themselves to be sidetracked into a debate about a particular issue. Individuals who are confrontational and looking to debate issues are often trying to deflect a discussion about their own spiritual life.

There may be times when the visit immediately gets off to a rough start. The family is not prepared. They do not have a Bible ready and it is clear that they are not prepared to talk. As office-bearers we should do our utmost to stay calm. If they are hesitant to speak, ask them in a kind way as to what is bothering them. If there is criticism, do not

join in but ask for solutions. Try to draw them out. Afterwards, as a visiting team, you must decide what to do with the criticism.

During the visit don't waste your time. Remember why you came to visit the family. Avoid asking unnecessary questions. Let the brothers and sisters you are visiting do the talking.

Even though there is great value in using a theme for all the home visits you should be careful not to stick to it slavishly but give room for spontaneity. Furthermore, there are certain aspects of faith life that should be worked into the theme. For example:

- Setting aside time for family and personal devotions; having regular times for reading the Bible and prayer
- Christian education of the children by both fathers and mothers
- Do the parents speak with each other and with their children about the preaching
- The literature that is being read and the use of the mass media
- Is there peace and harmony in the family and with others outside the home
- Living in the assurance of faith
- What is involved in being a living member of the church.

At the conclusion of a visit opportunity should be given for the members to voice questions, concerns and any matter that they would like to bring to the attention of the consistory. Here too, the elders must be careful that they keep the visit on track. Furthermore, in keeping with the character of the home visit it might be proper to ask if those being visited need the advice or help of the consistory in any matter.

Sometimes it works well to conclude the visit with a short passage of Scripture which summarizes what was discussed. Another suggestion would be to conclude the visit with singing a psalm or hymn from the Book of Praise. (Ephesians 5:19,20) In your closing prayer do not forget what was discussed during the visit. Show that you, as ambassadors of Christ have a listening ear for the cares and concerns of the members of the flock.