

Pointers for Effective Visitation Ministry

By Mission North America GO FINISH Team

Chief among the reasons why your church should have a visitation ministry is that people matter to both God and to you. Visiting them lets them know you care.

Who Needs to Be Visited: Anyone needing encouragement, comfort, or a sense of belonging would profit from a visit. While that could include everyone, there are certain individuals who especially need to be reminded that they aren't forgotten. These are people who can feel rather lonely at times.

- elderly people still living independently especially if they are shut-ins
- elderly or disabled people living in nursing homes
- people who are sick for a prolonged period of time
- people who are hospitalized
- bereaved people
- prisoners
- people in shelters
- people in crisis

We could add to the list those who are unsaved who may be reached through door-to-door visitation or bus ministry visitation. We could add visitors who may be encouraged to return by our hospitality outreach. Because this training section deals with helping ministries, we will primarily be dealing with the aforementioned list. Visitation to the unsaved and to visitors would fall more under outreach and assimilation ministries.

Who Should Do the Visitation: Many a pastor has fallen under criticism for failure to do enough visitation. Realistically, however, if the pastor is to adequately prepare sermons, counsel, and provide general leadership for the church, little time remains to visit everyone. Some churches have hired a visitation pastor to bridge the gap. Some churches have a visitation committee or team to share the load.

The biblical reality, when you look at the one another passages of Scripture, is that visitation is a corporate effort not just the pastor's or committee's job. If we are truly going to express care for one another, then we must sometimes go where the people are. We must lay aside our busy schedules and excuses and make people a priority.

How nice it is if the pastor from the church visits in our time of need. How encouraging if another member also visits during this time of crisis. But to have numerous people visit over the course of time, now there's a caring church.

To be sure, visitation will come easier for some people than others. While we all should be visiting one another on occasion, especially in time of need, people with a more outgoing personality or with the gifts of hospitality, exhortation, and/or mercy will be more prone to make visitation a part of their regular ministry. Visiting is a viable ministry for people with this kind of

gifting and/or personality, especially if their heart reaches out to people who are hurting, lonely, or in need.

What Should Happen in a Typical Visit: Fear of not knowing what to say or do is one of the big stumbling blocks to going out on visitation. You don't have to have a planned program to visit someone. Just being there matters more to them than what you do or say. Your presence communicates that you care and that is the bottom line in visiting someone in need. If you go with an obvious agenda, or planned out speech, people could feel that your agenda matters more than they do.

Here are some tips:

1. Spend most of your time listening.
2. Be sensitive with what you do say (i.e., the kind of stories you tell of people in similar situations).
3. Remember that you are there for them and not for yourself so be respectful.
4. Extend the gift of touch.
5. Offer to pray with or for them.
6. Leave something with them as a reminder of your visit like a card, a flower, a balloon, a picture, music, a book, last week's bulletin, food, or any small token.