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So **you**'ve been asked to . . .

Make Visits



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Acknowledgments

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So you've been asked to make visits in your church community? Wonderful! You may have been blessed already by the ministry of visiting your fellow believers, or maybe this is a new venture for you. Either way, you'll find specific and helpful tips in this pamphlet for making visits in a variety of situations.

Believers call on one another for a number of reasons: to console, to teach, to celebrate, to support, to encourage, to correct, to witness, or simply to see how folks are doing. Jesus teaches us that when we visit others in his name, it's as if we were visiting him. And such visits have eternal significance—on the day of judgment, he will invite each one who ministered in his name to claim “the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world” (Matt. 25:34).

Visiting: A Biblical Practice

Where did this custom of visiting fellow believers come from anyway? The practice of visiting stems from biblical times. The Old Testament records many such calls: God visited Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. Three heavenly beings visited Abraham and Sarah (Gen. 18:1-15). The prophet Nathan made a disciplinary visit to King David (2 Sam. 12:1-14). Ahaziah, King of Judah, called on Joram, King of Israel, when the latter was wounded in battle (2 Chron. 22:6).

The practice continues in the New Testament. Mary visited her cousin Elizabeth to discuss a deeply personal experience (Luke 1:39-56). Jesus made a social visit to Mary, Martha, and Lazarus and used the occasion to slip in some important teaching (John 11:17-44); he also visited the home of Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1-9) and called on Peter's mother-in-law, who was sick (Matt. 8:14-17). Paul and Barnabas went back to the towns where they had preached, for no other reason than to see how the believers were doing (Acts 15:36). You get the idea . . . the list goes on and on.

Within the church, spiritual calls to members of a congregation have traditionally been made by officebearers. But increasingly, church members like you are volunteering to make such calls, either alone or as part of a visiting team. The church of Christ is enriched when people like you agree to go calling in the congregation and beyond.

General Guidelines for Making Visits

- **Maintain confidentiality.** People under emotional strain will often confide in you, and it's important that you treat their trust with respect.

In general, it's a good policy not to disclose who you have visited or to talk about other people during a visit.

- **Maintain boundaries.** Let all your contacts be characterized by propriety and respect. Avoid excessive familiarity, as it can lead to emotional dependence.
- **Be gracious and discreet in your visits.** Maintain eye contact, be attentive and alert, and show interest. Don't interrupt or argue. Don't show impatience or misgivings. Don't ask inappropriate questions, such as "How old are you?" "Do you have enough money to retire?" "Was Mary adopted?" or "Wouldn't you like to be married?"
- **Avoid the temptation to be a problem solver.** People usually tell you their problems for one reason: so you can assure them of God's faithfulness to them. Your visit will probably be sidetracked if you begin to suggest solutions to their problems. Keep in mind that your hosts have given their problems a good deal more thought than you can in this short visit. Be ready to refer people to the care of an officebearer or a skilled counselor. Elders should make discipline calls. Trained therapists should visit those with marriage problems, those who have suffered abuse, or those struggling with addiction or mental illness.
- **Keep the conversation on target.** Avoid discussing the effectiveness of your church's minis try or other church-related issues that are controversial. If your hosts have concerns in such areas, suggest that they consult with the appropriate officebearers. Resist the tendency to talk about yourself. When gracious hosts ask you about your family and work, answer politely but briefly, then direct the attention back to your hosts. Your visit should usually be completed within an hour. If you focus on matters that matter, you can learn a lot in that time.
- **Take notes during the visit.** Set up a simple system in which you record pertinent information about people you have visited. Consult your notes frequently.
- **Close the visit with Bible reading and prayer.** This is almost always proper and appreciated. In your prayer thank God for your hosts, for their confession, and for the blessings they have received. Lay their needs before the Lord. Pray for guidance in matters that need further resolution. Finally, once you have announced that you will leave, leave, don't dally.
- **Evaluate your visits.** As you record details, ask yourself questions like these: How well did this visit go? Did I talk too much or too little?