Pastoral Visiting

Visiting is about building relationship, listening, encouraging and caring. When we visit someone in their home the aim of our visit is to make them feel loved and cared for. We are also there to help them with any need that they may have.

Things to help you prepare for a visit:-

- Arrange an appointment with the person either by phone or at church on a Sunday (this latter option is less formal – “I’ve been meaning to visit, would Wednesday or Thursday be convenient?”)
- Pray before you go. Ask God if there is anything you feel he wants you to say to the person if an opportunity arises. Ask God if there is any scripture that he wants you to share if the appropriate opportunity arises.
- Where possible avoid being alone in a pastoral situation with the opposite sex.

Things to help you during the visit:-

- Don’t stay too long! 45mins is usually a good guideline for a maximum unless the person begins to talk about deep issues that they need to deal with.
- If a person is ill staying a short time is better (even just 5 minutes) than them regretting you came because they feel so exhausted after you leave.
- Allow the person to relax with general conversation for a few minutes before you move onto any deeper issues if this has been requested.
- Try to engage the whole family who is there when you visit in conversation – try to show care for everyone.
- Listen carefully – ask questions to clarify things if you are not sure what the person is saying.
- Don’t be afraid to ask direct questions (but do be sensitive at the same time especially when the topic is medically related) – eg. The person says they struggle to get about. You could ask the question “Does that make it hard for you to do shopping?” etc.
- Think during the visit: Where is God in all this? Make sure you keep an ear on him and listen for his voice.
- Empathise with the situations they are going through – put yourself in their shoes and think how you would feel.
- Show genuine love in all that you do – Don’t give people the impression that the only reason you are visiting them is because they are on your care list! People like to know you truly care and don’t like feeling that the only reason you are visiting is because you have to. Think about what you communicate in this respect. Which communicates love better? “I’m visiting you because you’re on my list” OR “I’m visiting you because I wanted to check you’re doing ok.”
- Know your own limitations! Don’t tackle situations beyond what you feel comfortable with, always refer on to others if in doubt. Also seek to learn how to deal with those types of situations so that you grow in your abilities to care for people.
• Ask the person about their “story” – how they can to be living here, how they became a Christian, what they’ve done in their life. This helps to build relationship. Be prepared to share things about yourself as well.

• Sometimes it is hard to judge which issues are confidential during a visit. The best policy is to assume that it’s all confidential unless you are told otherwise. Seek the person’s permission to share it if you need get outside support (eg. “Would it be ok if I shared this with the pastor as he might be able to help?”)

• Don’t rush to solve their problems – listen first!

• Encourage people where possible.

• If people are looking for answers give people Biblical answers not own opinions. If you don’t know say you don’t and offer to find out and answer – Don’t pretend!

• Very occasionally a word of rebuke might be needed. Only use this with care and lovingly after praying about it to seek God’s guidance.

• Sometimes it may be appropriate to ask the direct question: “I’m going to go soon, was there anything else you wanted to talk about before I leave?”

• Offer to prayer for the person / family before you leave. Ask if there is anything specific they would like prayer for (this may allow them bring up issues that they really wanted to talk about but were scared to). Pray for them there and then.

• Don’t be afraid to ask questions about information gleaned from previous visits eg. How are things going at work now? How are you finding things with you in-laws now? etc.

• Perhaps read a scripture before you pray which you feel may be relevant to the person situation that you have discussed.

• Don’t turn a visit into an inquisition (investigation of how spiritual they are), but do talk about spiritual issues as the discussion allows.

• Treat each visit and each person as individuals. Be flexible in the way you structure your visit.

• Show God’s love through your time with the person.

• Do pray for healing where appropriate (even if it looks as if the people might die!) as this brings hope, turns the person to God in their suffering and you never know God may heal them!

After the visit

• Remember confidentiality – Don’t be a gossip!

• Write down any notes about follow up you have promised (this is to aid your memory!) and then do something about it!

After each visit try to evaluate how it went by asking yourself:

• What went well?
• What didn’t go so well?
• What can I learn from this situation for next time?
• What can I do to help myself?
• What or who else may help me?
• Did the visit express love?
• Did the visit glorify God?