

Visitation Team

A ministry description for local church leaders

Introduction

God asks the church to be a community of people sharing a common purpose and fellowship, continually growing in faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God. Paul describes the church as “his body, the fullness of him who filleth every thing in every way” (Eph. 1:22).

In the church we are specifically asked to “bear one another’s burdens” (Gal. 6:12) and “encourage one another” (I Thess. 5:11). People come to the church because they believe that in the body of Christ they will be cared for, challenged to grow and supported in their times of difficulty. Yet, in today’s world, they often find the church as impersonal and uncaring as secular institutions.

A church faithful to the Bible is a caring church. It is a church that plans to care for its members and visitors. It is intentional about implementing the New Testament commands to “serve one another” (Gal. 5:13) and to be “devoted to one another” (Rom. 12:10) by organizing planned ministries of visitation.

Because every believer is called to ministry and gifted for a specific form of ministry (Eph. 4:11-12), the work of visiting church members in their homes is not restricted to professional pastors, but shared by all those who have the ability. Each visitation team member is as dedicated and equipped for this purpose as the pastor.

Duties of the Visitation Team Member

The ministry to which a person is called when he or she becomes a minister of visitation can best be described in the following ways:

1. Incorporating new members. Unless a newly baptized or recently transferred member becomes friends with at least seven compatible individuals during the first six months, it is highly likely they will quit attending. Several visits should be made in those six months to find out about the new member and get them involved in ministry in the church, to identify the kind of friends that will be most appropriate and to invite them to events where they can make friends. With the newly baptized it is also important to help them identify their spiritual gifts, understand the organization and plans of the church, and learn to practice the standards of the church.

2. Contact visitors. Each new person who shows up on Sabbath and lives in the area should be contacted as soon as possible. It is usually most appropriate for a first-time visitor to be contacted by telephone, and often the prospect care coordinator (or interest coordinator) will make this call. Once a visitor has returned, or requested a house call, then the name will be given to one of the lay visitors. In this visit it is important to use listening skills to find out what has motivated attendance at church. What is happening with this person and how can we care for them? Is this a former Adventist or a friend or relative of an Adventist? Have they ever attended Adventist programs such as a stop-smoking plan, family life workshop or Bible seminar?

3. Visit inactive. When a person breaks their regular routine of church attendance with no simple explanation such as vacation or business travel, it is “a cry for help.” They are experiencing some pain in their lives and have found it more comfortable to quit attending than to continue. Often the source of pain has nothing directly to do with the church, but is complicated because their regular friends in the congregation are not responding to their needs. For example, when a church member goes through a divorce it is common for the other church members to back off from contact because they “don’t know what to say.” The visitation team has the task of arranging for a contact immediately to listen, try to identify the real source of pain and help them bear that burden. If members or non-members who have stopped attending are visited promptly—within six weeks of the attendance break—nine out of ten will return to the church.

4. Visit members who are hurting. People who are hospitalized, individuals who are terminally ill as well as their families, persons who are separated or in the process of divorce, those having an unplanned pregnancy, individuals and families of those who are in trouble with the law, families who must put a loved one in a nursing home, parents with handicapped children, the bereaved including parents suffering a miscarriage, those shut-in at home or institutionalized, those who have lost their job, and members struggling with their faith in God all deserve a visit from the church. The visitation team plays a key role in meeting this need because in a typical congregation at any one time fully one quarter of the members may fall into one of these categories and the pastor, who usually has more than one church, cannot carry the full load.

5. Visit at the time of life events. Occasions of joy, as well as pain, need the participation of the church in order to bring them into spiritual focus. Members of the visitation team will be asked to contact parents whose children are leaving home for school, people getting married, families having a graduation, couples experiencing the birth of a child, people in the process of moving in or out of town, and those who are retiring.

6. Yearly contact. In healthy churches each member household gets a visit at least once a year. It may simply be a “listening visit” to get their input regarding the church program. This goal cannot be achieved in most congregations unless lay visitors help it happen.

Resource Materials

The following resources are recommended for your ministry. You can purchase these by calling AdventSource (800-328-0525), the Adventist Book Center (800-765-6955) or your local Christian bookstore.

Adventist Mission in the 21st Century, ed. by Jon Dybdahl. Subtitled “Presenting Jesus to a Diverse World,” this book asks some serious questions: What have we accomplished? What challenges remain? What are we doing to finish the work? What works and what doesn’t?

Christian Caregiving—A Way of Life by Kenneth C. Haugk (1984, Augsburg) is the basic textbook of the Stephen Series.

Community of Faith, by Russell Staples. The author explores the biblical and theological background for our understanding of the church and its role in today’s world.

Power Witnessing: How to Witness to Different Personalities, by David Farmer. Explains temperament theory and how to tailor one’s witness to individual personalities so as to appeal to their unique worldview.

Safety Zone, by Paul Richardson, Warren Nelson and Curtis Rittenour. A seminar that trains members to reach former and inactive members.

Studying Together, by Mark Finley. This ready-reference Bible handbook assists you in studying Christ-centered truths with friends and neighbors.

Who Are the Seventh-day Adventists? by John Seaman. This sharing booklet gives a brief sketch of Adventist history, beliefs, people, church, and mission.

You Can Keep Them if You Care, by James Cress. Helping new members assimilate into the life and ministries of the church.

Visit AdventSource On-Line at www.adventsource.org for a complete list of the latest resources available for local church leaders. You can place an order or request a catalog by calling 1-800-328-0525.

For information about additional resources and answers to your questions call the Adventist Plusline at 1-800-732-7587 or visit them on-line at www.plusline.org.