

CHAPTER 19

The Ministry of Visitation

The instruction given in the *Church Manual* concerning the visitation of members is: “An important duty belonging to deacons is that of visiting church members in their homes. In many churches this is arranged by a distribution of membership by districts, assigning a deacon to each district, with the expectation that he will visit each home at least once a quarter.”²² This duty is also listed as a responsibility of the deaconesses.

Some of the reasons for visitation are: to become better acquainted with the membership; strengthen new members and absentee members; reclaim backsliders; call on the sick and shut-ins; identify and follow-up on the needs of the elderly, disabled, widows, and single parents (such as house cleaning, yard work, meals, transportation, child care, home weatherization, and other improvements); address family crisis (such as spiritual problems, disaster, illness, domestic violence, bereavement, marital problems, financial problems, and children’s behavioral problems); and encourage faithfulness in matters of stewardship.

The Visit

1. Visit in twos: One will pray silently while the other is conversing. A husband wife team is the ideal for visitation, in that the male and female perspectives are represented. However, teams may consist of two deacons; two deaconesses; a deacon and his spouse; a deaconess and her spouse; a deacon and an elder; a deacon and a male church member; and a deaconess and a female church member. In rare situations when a male and female that are not married to each other visit together, they are to use every safeguard that they can to guard against any of Satan’s false

²²General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, *Church Manual*, 57.

accusations.

2. Dress appropriately: Deacons should wear a coat and tie. If the weather is too hot for a coat, shirt and tie should be worn. Deaconesses should be modestly attired in a dress or skirt and blouse.
3. Visiting the Home: State the purpose of the visit upon entering the home—to represent the church and the pastoral staff's concern for the family. It is best to call and schedule visits. However, don't be afraid to "drop by." Unscheduled, spontaneous visits can also be a blessing.
4. The Spirit of the Visit: Pray before entering the home, and maintain the attitude of prayer throughout the visit. It is not a social visit but a spiritual visit.
5. The Nature of the Conversation: Try to assess the needs of the family. Engage them in conversation about their home, the church, their community, their employment, members of their family, and themselves. Document your assessment of the family's needs on a Membership Visitation Form (see example forms at end of chapter). "Be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath" (Jas 1:19). Don't gossip, nor listen to gossip. Don't take sides when family members disagree. Don't try to defend the pastor, church officer, or member with whom the family may have some differences. Stay objective and assure them that you will join them in prayer for the situation.
6. Length of Visit: Most visits should be about 15-25 minutes. However, in extenuating circumstances, the visit may take longer.
7. Completing the Visit: The closing conversation should be deeply spiritual, and ended with prayer. Respectfully ask that radios or televisions be turned down or off before you begin to pray. The prayer should be brief, but comprehensive enough to include the needs discussed during the visit. Call the family members by name in your prayer. After you have prayed, leave promptly.
8. Review the information that was placed on the Membership Visitation Forms at the end of the day and fill out a Visitation and Outreach Referral Form on each family that has needs. Keep a copy of each form that you fill out for your records and give a copy to the leader of the ministry that can meet the family's needs, the personal ministries leader, and the pastor. After the leader meets the needs, he/she gives a copy of the completed

form to the deacon, deaconess, or elder that made the visit, the personal ministries leader, and the pastor. The deacon, deaconess, or elder is to check with the leader to make sure that the families' needs are met in a timely manner.

The Problem-Solving Process

Naomi I. Brill explains the social systems approach to solving problems in the following manner:

A family is a system characterized by intimate and specialized relationships. Usually the crisis that precipitates the need for help comes as a problem of an individual family member, a child failing in school or involved in delinquent behavior, a father who cannot hold a job, a mother who drinks heavily, an interfering grandparent, a marriage that is unhappy and deteriorating. The balance within this malfunctioning family is based on the behavior of the troubled family member, and the system will tend to pressure this member to continue in that role. Any change within the member apart from the system is extremely difficult to maintain. While the worker may help on an individual basis, focus should be on work with the family as a whole in order to change the family system and give the individual a fighting chance for healthy behavior.²³

Based upon this statement, we can better understand why sometimes our best efforts turn out to be a "band-aid." It is important that deacons and deaconesses understand the problem-solving process within the context of the social systems approach. This will enable them to become more effective in making assessments during their visitations, and in providing quality care for families in crisis.

The problem-solving process is a method that is commonly used in the social work discipline. It is a systematic approach used to empower persons with problems to become actively involved in

²³Naomi I. Brill, *Working with People: The Helping Process*, 2nd ed. (New York: J. B. Lippincott Co., 1978), 86.

developing a plan of action toward a solution. There are nine steps to this process. They are practical and relevant and can be used by deacons and deaconesses as they do their visitation. I have redefined the steps to relate to the ministry context. These are the nine steps:

1. **Engagement:** During the visitation, establish objective and open communication with as many members of the family as possible. This will assist you in formulating preliminary hypotheses (assumptions) for the problem.
2. **Assessment:** Appraise the situation based upon factual information presented by family members and others familiar with situation; the family's feelings and belief system; and other circumstances.
3. **Definition:** Work with the family to define the immediate problem, the underlying cause of the immediate problem, and the factors that are standing in the way of finding a prevention.
4. **Set Goals:** With input from the family, set some realistic goals. This step is most effective when the family has the greater voice in deciding what needs to be achieved and how it should be done.
5. **Alternatives:** Look at all of the possible ways of addressing the problem and select the best one(s).
6. **Contract:** Establish an agreement about the roles and responsibilities of each participant. Everyone is to be held accountable.
7. **Action:** Take steps toward achieving goals.
8. **Evaluation:** Evaluate the outcome of the action to determine whether or not it was successful.
9. **Continuation:** Continue to follow the working plan modifying it as needed.²⁴

By utilizing the problem-solving process in visitation, deacons and deaconesses will be better equipped to provide quality care for families in crisis. They will have a greater awareness of the church's responsibility to have an equitable system in place for meeting the needs of the members that are poor and sick. As they visit and assess

²⁴Ibid., 91.

the physical, social, emotional, and spiritual needs of the church members they will seek ways to meet them. This will require the deacons and deaconesses to become knowledgeable of the available resources in the church and in the community, and know the proper steps to take in order to obtain these resources. They are to educate the members in need on what community agencies they can go to for help and how to apply for help.

The church may decide to organize an interdisciplinary team to assist in providing quality care for members in crisis situations. Here are some suggestions for accomplishing this:

1. See that deacons, deaconesses, and elders are trained to apply the problem-solving process in the framework of the social systems approach in visitation.
2. The interdisciplinary team is to consist of a medical physician, nurse, social worker, home health aide, chaplain, financial advisor, substance abuse counselor, and a marriage counselor. Depending upon the needs of the church, other professionals may be added or used in place of these.
3. When the deacons, deaconesses, and elders discover families in crisis through visitation, they would give a copy of their assessment to the team's social worker.
4. The social worker would counsel with the family, develop a plan for intervention, and meet with the other members of the team.
5. Based upon the situation, the team would network within the church and community to assist the family in resolving the problem. (See ecogram at end of chapter as an example of church and community resources for networking)

MEMBERSHIP VISITATION FORM

Visited by _____ Date _____

- 1. Member's name _____ Phone _____
Address _____
- 2. Best time to visit? _____
- 3. Do I need to call before coming? _____ Yes No _____
- 4. How long have you been a member of this church? _____
- 5. What do you like best about this church? _____

- 6. Does everyone in your family have a Bible? _____ Yes No _____
- 7. Are Sabbath school quarterlies in the home? _____ Yes No _____
- 8. Do you own any Spirit of Prophecy books? _____ Yes No _____
- 9. Are all members of the family baptized SDAs? _____ Yes No _____
- 10. Is there family worship in the home daily? _____ Yes No _____
- 11. Are the children in church school? _____ Yes No _____

Circle grade level: Elementary High school College

- 12. Is a spouse missing from the home? _____ Yes No _____
Which? _____

- 13. Do you understand tithes and offerings? _____ Yes No _____
- 14. Have you taught your children to tithe? _____ Yea No _____
- 15. Do any members of the family need work? _____ Yes No _____
Who? _____ Type of work? _____

- 16. Are you employed? _____ Yes No _____
Where? _____ How long? _____

- 17. Are you having Sabbath employment problems? _____ Yes No _____

- 18. List the names and ages of your family. Circle SDA if they are members.

SDA _____

SDA _____

SDA _____

- 19. Family's Needs Assessment: _____

VISITATION AND OUTREACH REFERRAL FORM

Member's name _____
Address _____ City _____
State _____ Zip _____ Telephone () _____

Event and date of event: _____

Ministry(s) needed: _____

Member's need(s) referred to _____ Outreach Ministry
Date of referral _____
Referral made by: _____ Telephone () _____

.....
Ministry(s) provided: _____

Date provided _____

Comments: _____

Person(s) who provided the ministry(s):
_____ Telephone () _____
_____ Telephone () _____
_____ Telephone () _____

(After both sections are completed, give a copy to the pastor, personal ministries leader, & visiting officer)

PERSONAL INFORMATION SHEET

Name _____ Telephone () _____
Address _____
City _____ State _____ Zip _____
Occupation _____ Employer _____
Date of birth _____

Children Names	Birthday
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

Public Service Record

Military _____ Business _____

Other organizations _____

Previous Church Experience (check)

- ___ Church officer or committee member
- ___ Church school worker
- ___ Teacher
- ___ Secretarial
- ___ Music ___ vocalist ___ instrumentalist
 what instrument? _____
- ___ Outreach ministries (describe) _____

Please check inreach and outreach ministries in which you are interested in working:

Inreach Ministry

- Sabbath School
- Teaching
- Music
- Greeter
- Usher
- Other _____

Class Levels

- Cradle Roll
- Kindergarten
- Primary
- Junior
- Earliteen
- Youth
- Adult
- Extension Division
(Shut-ins)

Outreach Ministry

- Vacation Bible School
- Counselor or craft
- Teach or help
- Transportation

Personal Ministries

- Children Story Hour
- Communications
- Community Services
- Health Education
- Lay Bible Ministry
- Nutrition Classes
- Tracts and Literature
- Visitation and Prayer
- Witnessing and Bible Studies
- Other _____

ECOGRAM

