

## **PASTORAL VISITATION AND COUNSELING**

### **1. Pastor's Role in Visitation**

There are two views:

- Pastor must know his people in order to minister relevantly to their needs. It is not possible for the pastor to even preach meaningfully to the people unless he visits them and is aware of the problems they face.
- Pastor is to devote his time to the primary tasks of ministering the Word and prayer. It is not possible for him to spend the time he needs for these if he is also weighed down by regular and routine visitation.

### **2. Members' View toward Pastoral Visitation**

- Some expect frequent pastoral visits, especially if the congregation is small. They will view that the pastor is not doing his job if he does not visit them regularly.
- Some expect the pastor to be aware of their need for comfort and encouragement, and to visit them to minister to them. These are people who are facing loneliness because of various reasons.
- Some view pastoral visitation as an invasion of their privacy. Their attitude is like this: "If I need him, I will call him. Until then, I would prefer that he leaves me alone." They may not be hostile, but certainly view the pastoral visit as an inconvenience.
- Some are delighted with an occasional visit by the pastor, but feel uncomfortable if he visits too frequently.

The first year of ministry is a good time for the pastor to assess who desires routine visitation and at what frequency. A good way to help in this assessment is to use a pastoral visitation check form. This form can continue to be used even after the initial assessment as conditions and needs of people do change.

### **3. Pastoral Visitation Ministry**

**3.1 Beginning home visitation.** If he is called to a small or medium-sized church, the pastor can set as a primary goal the visitation of every home unit represented in his congregation. He should give such visits a higher priority at this point than any programme he may wish to initiate.

He should avoid making spontaneous visits without giving prior notice. If he finds only the wife at home when he visits, he should stay only for a while, and promise to call again when both spouses can be home.

If the pastor senses that the party he calls to make an appointment does not desire a visit, he should not press the issue. Instead, he should minister as

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much as he could while on the phone with the other person, leaving open the visit at a more opportune time.

At no time should the pastor visit a woman alone at home all by himself. He should either bring his wife along, or have another leader to accompany him.

**3.2 Enlisting visitation helpers.** The first year of ministry is also a good time for the pastor to identify people who have the qualities and can be equipped for the visitation ministry. As most visitation skills are often caught than taught, it is wise for the pastor to bring along these people when he visits (but not all of them at the same time). Debriefing can be done with the trainee after every visit to talk about the lessons learnt. Retired people are often a good pool to enlist help for such a ministry.

**3.3 Social events.** The first year of ministry is also a good time for the pastor to organize events where both leaders and members can visit his home. This will help him to get to know his people better, and for them to get to know him and his family better. Also, it helps the pastor to exemplify the ministry of hospitality before his people.

Another way to connect with leaders and members at the social level is to meet with one or several of them at a convenient time and place for breakfast or lunch. At the end of the meeting, it is good that the pastor volunteer to pay from time to time. This is one way to show others that he is learning to live by faith, not by charity.

In the first year of ministry, the pastor and his family should attend as wide a range of social events as possible for the purpose of mutual bonding.

## **4. Visiting People**

**4.1 Shut-ins.** These people include the aged, handicapped, and those who are chronically ill. They are people with real needs and should be visited by the pastor or someone assigned as often as possible.

**4.2 New members.** The pastor may call on new members in their homes, or invite them to his home for a time of fellowship and pastoral welcome.

**4.3 Guests.** These visitors should be given an information package about the church. A card to help them indicate if they would like to be visited should also be handed to them (in the package itself or at an appropriate time during service). The completed card can be dropped into the offering bag or a specially designed box for appropriate attention and action.

**4.4 A large church.** The pastor called to a large church may find it impractical to visit all his people. However, he should make it a point to visit all his leaders for the purpose of bonding. It will be good if periodic visit can be accorded to aged, shut-ins, or bereaved. For a hospitalized member, an initial visit (soon after admission) by the pastor is always appreciated. Subsequent

follow-up visitation may be delegated to someone else with the pastor being regularly updated of the patient's condition.

## 5. Hospital Visitation

Some pointers:

- Engage in light-hearted conversation as best as possible.
- Read Scripture.
- Pray.
- Avoid pat answers or being judgmental towards the patient's apparent lack of faith.
- Exercise sensitivity, calmness, and reassurance.
- Avoid sitting on patient's bed (you are his/her guest!).
- Be cheerful but not boisterous (sensitive to his/her pain and other patients).
- Position in such a way that the patient can see you without straining (adjust the bed if necessary).
- Be discerning and discreet about touching the patient (especially those diseased or of the opposite sex).
- Leave when patient is tiring or other guests are arriving.
- Give a gesture of concern (flowers, card, etc.).
- Don't wake up patient if he/she is asleep (leave a note and visit another time).
- Just be present with tears if need be, but little words (in cases of loss and trauma).

The surgical patient:

- Visit him immediately before the surgery to minister to the patient.
- Visit him soon after the surgery.
- Visit patient at home if there is extensive period of convalescence.

The unbelieving patient:

- Be discerning and discreet about sharing the gospel.
- Seize the opportune time, but don't be pushy.

The comatose patient:

- Talk to the patient as if he/she is able to hear and understand all that you say (present the gospel if need be in a very simple and concise manner).

The terminally ill patient:

- Who should tell the patient about his/her condition?  
❖ Doctor?

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- ❖ Family members?
- ❖ Pastor?

## 6. The Pastor as Counsellor

### 6.1 Establishing a pastoral counselling ministry. Some considerations:

- *What kind of counselling ministry?* You must determine the basic nature of your counselling ministry and the kind of people you feel qualified to counsel. For example, you may feel very comfortable counselling married couples, but very awkward counselling teenage singles. You need to decide whom you feel you can best minister to, so that you will raise up other counselling helpers who can better minister to those people beyond your best ability. For example, you need to consider whether or not you can minister effectively to children; to those in adolescence; to those considering marriage; to those who are married; to those who are divorced or widowed; to those in mid-life crisis; to those in their old age; etc.
- *What extent of counselling ministry?* Consider what types of problems you feel qualified to deal with. Again, the pastor must make a personal determination of his own skills and abilities, while being willing to readily accept his own limitations. For example, you need to seriously consider whether or not you can effectively counsel to people in a suicide crisis, to people in serious family crisis, to people who have been seriously abused in the past and now carry deep emotional scars, to people with alcohol or drug abuse problems, to people struggling with homosexuality, to others with AIDS, etc. The point is this—you must know your personal limitations and develop a network of helpers that can minister effectively where you cannot.
- *What additional limitations established?* There are several additional factors that must also be considered. For example, many pastors will not counsel women alone. They will always want one additional person to be in counselling session, that being the pastor's wife most frequently. Other pastors have decided that they will not counsel outside of their own fellowship, feeling that is where they must devote their time and maintain their responsibility. This is probably a wise guideline, and yet there should be some flexibility depending on the circumstances.
- *What time will be given to counselling ministry?* There are many other ministerial responsibilities, only one of which is counselling, and you must decide how much of your valuable time you will actually commit to this aspect of your ministry.
- *When should you refer people to others in your counselling ministry?* You must be willing to refer to others whenever the case exceeds the limitations you have imposed upon your counselling ministry. In

addition, you must also refer whenever you determine a particular case is really beyond your ability to handle effectively. Don't be so proud that you refuse to admit your inability! Recognize that there are many others who are far more qualified than you in any given case. In fact, it is wise that you refer any case that would take more than 6-8 sessions to resolve. If more time than that is necessary, then the case is probably more difficult than the pastor should be handling.

## 6.2 Developing your church counselling ministry

- *The pastor's role in the counselling ministry.* The pastor must assume the primary responsibility for counselling until others are well qualified to assist him. It is a recognized fact that most of the congregation will want to see the pastor when they have a problem. Therefore, the pastor must be willing to see them.
- *The pastor's role in training counsellor leaders.* The wise pastor will also train and develop counselling leaders from the congregation. These will be people in whom the pastor detects a giftedness or ability to counsel effectively. The most logical place to begin is with the elders, then the staff members, and finally the relevantly gifted people in the congregation.
- *The pastor's role in training congregational counsellors.* The next step is to begin to train the entire congregation to be able to counsel one another. If they are well grounded in Scripture, and somewhat mature in the Lord, they will be able to minister very effectively with some specific training in counselling techniques.
- *The pastor's role in developing counselling ministries.* In addition to training and developing counsellors, the pastor should also develop counselling ministries within the church. For example, why not develop an extensive pre-marital counselling ministry that will meet the need of those in the congregation, but would also extend to the surrounding community as well? There are also great possibilities with alcohol and drug abuse counselling groups, with people facing mid-life crisis, marriage and family problems, etc. Thus many different kinds of counselling ministries could be established that would minister to the church in particular, the Christian community in general, and even the hurting world.
- *The body of Christ as a group of counsellors.* The vision is that of the body of Christ effectively ministering to other people. The primary role of the pastor is that of training them to be effective. Thus the pastor is ultimately the leader of this well-trained group, and seen as the primary resource in that respect, rather than being viewed as the only one who can counsel effectively. Thus his load is reduced, the entire church is involved, and much more effective ministry is actually taking place than the pastor could possibly accomplish by himself.

### 6.3 The value of the pastoral counselling ministry

- *In relation to really knowing your people.* This is a great way to get to know your people realistically. So many of them have somewhat of a spiritual façade on Sunday morning. This way the pastor gets to know their real lives, their struggles and their problems, and their desires and their goals. It brings a sense of reality to the relationship between the pastor and his people.
- *In relation to your preaching ministry.* Your counselling ministry will stimulate your preaching ministry, and it will probably bring a greater sense of realism to it. It will help you bring your sermons to the practical level where your people are really living. There are other factors that must also be remembered:
  - ❖ Proper preaching will ultimately decrease your counselling load for the word of God will make dramatic changes in the lives of your people.
  - ❖ Proper preaching will also occasionally provoke a counselling need since the Holy Spirit will deal with someone in a manner whereby he/she will need your help
- *In relation to bridge-building.* A counselling ministry can be a great bridge-builder to all kinds of people. Whereas you might never see certain kinds of people in church on Sunday morning, they may be willing to see you in an informal and non-threatening counselling session. This provides great opportunity to help people, to share the gospel with them, to disciple them, etc.

### 6.4 The features of the pastoral counselling ministry

- *Following the example of Jesus:*
  - ❖ Compassion (Mark 1:41; 6:34; 8:2)
  - ❖ Acceptance (Luke 19; John 4,8)
  - ❖ Worth to others (Mark 2:27; Luke 9:11)
  - ❖ Responsibility (Luke 5:24; 6:10; John 5)
  - ❖ Hope, encouragement, inspiration (Matt. 11:28-30; Mark 10:26-27; John 14:27; 16; 17)
  - ❖ Redirected thinking—refashioning people's thinking (Matt. 19:4-9; Luke 7:3-50; 8:22-25)
  - ❖ Teaching others (Luke 6:39, 42; 14:2-6; 20:28)
  - ❖ Positive authority (Matt. 7:29)
  - ❖ Admonishment and confrontation (Matt. 8:26; 18:15; John 8:3-11)
  - ❖ Seeing needs of others (example: Nicodemus)
  - ❖ His words (soft-spoken, harsh, His look of anger)
  - ❖ Emphasis upon the right behaviour (Luke 6:47-49)

- *Making use of available tools.* The wise pastor will maximize the counselling time. Thus he should make use of testing material that is available; he should develop personal questionnaires relating to specific problems, case history inventories, personal surveys, etc.
- *Assigning homework to enhance the sessions.* This enables much more to be accomplished in each session, and actually continues the session beyond the time allotment. It also helps you determine their seriousness, and keeps them accountable.

#### 6.5 The dangers of the pastoral counselling ministry

- *Sexual attraction to female counselees.* This can be a very serious problem, and every pastor must recognize and accept the reality of this. In addition, every pastor must accept his own vulnerability and weakness at this point! Therefore, counsel in such a way so as to prevent this from happening as much as possible (e.g. have other people in close proximity, keep the door ajar, don't allow yourself to get too close either emotionally or physically, etc.)
- *Becoming emotionally involved with counselee.* The pastor cannot become emotionally involved with the counselee; he must maintain a dignified objectivity. Remember what God has called you to do as a pastor, and view each counselling encounter in relation to that overall call. It is certainly proper to express emotions during sessions, but do not become emotionally involved.
- *Discerning those who waste your time.* There are many people who are simply bored with life, lonely, confused, and looking for a listening ear. They assume and expect that the pastor owes them time and they will demand it from you. Learn to discern those people who do not really want help, but do want your time!
- *Discerning those who are sympathy seekers.* There are others who do not really want help. All they want to do is complain and solicit sympathy. They want someone who will cry with them, support them, and sympathize with them. They will manipulate the pastor's time and compassion in order to continue their behaviour.

#### 6.6 Breaking confidentiality in counselling

One possible reason:

- There is concrete reason to believe that counselee is going to kill/harm himself or someone else.