

A Home Visit

As a pastor, you'll be called upon to go to parishioners' homes. Home visits are becoming rare and more infrequent as some of our society in the United States especially you'll see home visits are not as frequent. But in emergencies and other times of stress, home visits become very, very important. Today, we're going to talk about that. I'm going to include a nursing home and a few other kinds of encouragements along the way as well. But I'm calling this session the home visit.

Understand local home dynamics. I would imagine this would apply anywhere in the world. Try to be very professional. Come into a home and come in with purpose. Knock on the door. Before you get there, use the bathroom. You go "Pastor, what if I have to go?" I'm just encouraging you. Use the bathroom before you get there. In today's era, that for some people stresses them out if someone uses the bathroom at that time if there are germs in the air. I don't know. I'm just telling you. I've learned this by the school of pastor reality. Use the bathroom before you get there. Now if you absolutely have to use the bathroom, okay, fine. But in general, make that your practice. Again, be prepared.

Respect boundaries. Here's an example to respect boundaries. If you as a man is meeting a woman at home alone, don't do it. Come to that house and make sure that family members are there, the husband is there, vice versa. If you're a woman, don't go and visit a man alone. Those are just boundaries to keep in mind. These are dynamics and you respect the boundaries. In the home is a very incredible boundary. It's someone's living space.

When you arrive, be sensitive to the situation. If there's hospital bed there or if it's even visiting maybe an elderly couple, be sensitive. Be a little quieter, not so loud. I'm a loud person so I got to tone it down. I'm kind of ADD at times. I'll sort of be sensitive to the situation if I'm visiting the elderly or someone who's sick. I just have to tone myself down. Time to just calm down, Henry. Be sensitive to every situation. Local hospitality conventions apply. Each of you in your local situation know, and if you don't know, find a pastor and ask about such things as do you take your shoes off in this area. Do you bring a gift? Every area has sort of local hospitality conventions.

Do not commit on anything that will add or stress or adds work or stress to your guests. Do not comment on anything that will bring work. I'll give you an example. You come into a house and you're going to comment on something. Don't say things like "I can find someone to help you keep your house clutter free in this time." What did you just do? You just commented on something that brings stress to your guests. "Oh, the pastor thinks I'm a slob now." "Oh, the pastor's going to help me by finding someone to help me when our life is totally upside down because he's critical at our house right now." In general, leave those comments that will add work or stress to your guests away from yourself.

Now you're visiting. This one is very similar to a hospital visit. Be encouraging but don't become the answer person. Listen more than talk. If the patient wants to talk, if the patient and the parishioners don't want to talk, see that situation and you may only be there five, ten minutes. When the patient is present, don't talk often as if they were not there just like in a hospital. Ask the patient or the family the plan of treatment. Now if you've just seen a shut-in, and of course these things don't apply in the same way. A passage read, very similar to a hospital as it's winding down, you're visiting down, you have a passage unless the patient has one you can read. But sort of ask for permission and announce your praying just like we talked about in the last presentation on a hospital visit. The material of your prayer should be given to you in the visit.

Let's talk about shut-ins. These are people who maybe can't come to church. A lot of times you're going to be there longer because they're sort of excited about talking to someone. They can't get out. Maybe they're not mobile. But here's a few points of advice. Announce the length when you first get there and ask if they have that much time. For instance, you can come and you're with a shut-in and say, "I've got thirty minutes. Is that all right?" If they say, "Well, thanks for coming. That would be fine." If they sort of feel like they're hesitant like that's too much, make it a fifteen minute visit. My point is try to lay out ahead of time and try to see that feedback. There is this art to this as much as a finesse to this.

Sometimes they go like "Only thirty minutes, Pastor?" Then you go like "You know what? For you, Alice, I'm going to stay longer. I can see you just really are lonely today." It's that kind of a inter-reaction for shut-ins. I will tell you this. You can joke about this a little bit. Some ways, you can't please everybody on this one. You may stay thirty minutes and they want you to stay for three hours. That's okay and you do have to leave but be professional. Be nice. Be uplifting. Be respectful.

I always find that if you announce your sort of like "I got about thirty minutes to an hour here today, Alice" or George or whatever, you sort of gear it in. What you don't want to do is just come and now it's an hour later or an hour and a half later and then finally you're sort of feeling that you got to leave. And then you say, "I better leave" and then the shut-in says, "You only just got here, Pastor." That's what I'm saying. The best thing to do is sort of set the expectation sort of as you're coming in. notice how I use the words "sort of." It's an art here and as you get experienced as a pastor, you're going to learn how that actually operates.

One thing about shut-ins is sometimes their present memory is not as strong as their past memory. So talk about the past. Tell me about how your kids are doing. When you first got married, what brought you two together? Those types of things help them think about the past and reflect on God's work in the past. Even ask. If they're believers, ask about aspects of their spiritual journey or about how the church was back in the 1950s. All of those things are all very beneficial and encouraging to shut-ins.

Let's say you're visiting a nursing home. A lot of ways, treat a nursing home like you treat a hospital. Wash hands when you get there. Announce the length---I notice also a hospital and like a home

I should say---announce the length of your stay. Be careful not to take too much time. Talk about the past. Ask questions. But ask questions in a very comfortable way. No inquisitions here. And ask about spiritual journeys. In the nursing homes, you'll also find---this is just a little courtesy too---as you're walking to a room, you'll see other elderly in the hallway in a wheelchair. You know I find to do is just kind of stop and "Hello, sir" and spend fifteen minutes and you'll find that many of these people have not been visited by anybody in a long time.

If you go there as a pastor representing Christ, I like to give myself an extra fifteen minutes to a half hour of just mingling. "Hey, ma'am. How are you doing?" Real quick. Five minutes. "Hey, can I have a prayer with you?" You will find that they're just there to minister at times, not just the parishioner who's there, but in general you bring Christ in a very special way to many times very lonely people.

Another thing to do is at your church, organize a group to sing or minister. Volunteer if they have a chaplain's office or ask the front desk and say, "I'd volunteer to lead a worship service." Or you say to the staff, "We'd like to bring a group here to sing Christmas carols." All of those things all make such a difference in the local area. When you leave, leave a card. Leave a booklet. A track if desired. A tape. Sometimes, some elderly have like a CD player. If your church has messages that are recorded on CD, bring those messages. That's such a blessing to those who are in nursing homes and this also applies when you're visiting shut-ins.

If the family is there, walk with the family. Ask if the church can do anything. Now, it's interesting in the last presentation I talked about how to call the family ahead of time. I also recommend---I'm kind of jumping a little bit. I forgot to mention this earlier. But it's a good idea to call the family of that person nursing home. Call the daughter. Call the son and say, "I'd like to visit your mom. Are you going to be going there?" "Oh, yes. I'm going to be going there tonight." To me, over the years I have learned it's better to visit a nursing home when a child or someone is there. If it's just you, that's fine as well. Again, here's a great time to bring an elder or a parishioner or someone with a gift along with you.

Here are just a couple of closing words of advice. Really be sensitive to the home nature of things whether it's a nursing home or the regular home. And even when you're in a nursing home, they're not going to have a lot of possessions in their bedroom in a nursing home. But you know what? Maybe they have three or four pictures, pictures of twenty years ago or forty years ago. This is your opportunity in a nursing home. A lot of times, your parishioners might be sitting in a wheelchair and there's a picture of their son. You can utilize the room.

In a hospital, usually you don't have those aids to sort of help you because in a hospital room, there is basically all the hospital stuff, the equipment. But in a nursing home, there are some things that mean a lot to the person that's now shut in a nursing home. They don't have very much. It really says that you come into the word with a baby. Many people leave out of a nursing home that they pass away and if

they're believers they're with the Lord. But they have a few things and those few things mean something more than you can imagine. Notice the few things that are in that nursing home room.

If you're in a home, notice the pictures. Notice an award. Notice things and keep the topics about the person you're visiting as opposed to talking about how you're going to do this. Update them on news from the church. That's fine. Not gossip. But keep the conversation focused on to the people that you're visiting and really love them and be sensitive to who they are.

A home visit, a nursing home visit, one common in both those elements is there's more personal artifacts. You treat those opportunities of opportunities to minister and to touch someone's life for Christ. But even there, just to reiterate, be positive. Be professional. Be caring. Communicate with the staff. Be on team to bless those parishioners that you need to visit.