



15 Tips for Home and Hospital Visits

Due to a pandemic, hospital and home visits by clergy and lay leaders from the churches were nearly nonexistent for a year or two. Now the opportunity has returned to make intentional and regular visits. These visits are an important part in the life of the church community and in particular to the parishioners. This is especially true for older adults who may not be able to get out regularly or come to the church building. Visitation is about being present with the person, being the presence of Christ. The important thing is that you are there, not what you do or say. It's a ministry of presence. What people need from us is love and compassion, not explanations and answers.

The following are some suggestions that offer practical guidelines to making home and hospital visits which can be shared with lay leaders.

- 1. Do not visit unless you are healthy.** If you have a sore throat, fever, or other ailment, it is best to not make a visit as you do not want to pass on anything. Wash your hands before you arrive.
- 2. Think about why you are visiting.** Different purposes for a visit may mandate different demeanors, different preparation, or include additional people.
- 3. If possible, telephone ahead and make an appointment for the visit.** It is preferable to visit when they do not have other time pressures. And check in just before you go to make sure it is still appropriate to visit. Avoid saying things like "I've been assigned to you".
- 4. Be on time for the visit.** If you are delayed, telephone immediately and let them know or make other arrangements.
- 5. Wear a name tag.** This helps to identify you and it assists the person you are visiting to remember your name. Introduce yourself with name and church to all who are present.
- 6. Say a silent prayer before entering the house or room.** Let the Holy Spirit direct your thoughts and actions. Remember also you are representing the church to the older adult.

- 7. Be a good house guest.** Do not wear intentional fragrances. Some people are sensitive to specific odors. Let them serve you to whatever extent they are able. Consider bringing along something from the church like a bulletin, card from the children, shawl. At the hospital offer to wash eyeglasses or find fresh ice and water.
- 8. Think before you wake up someone up.** Sleeping heals the body. Particularly those in the hospital may have been awake at night due to noise, pain, anxiety, etc. Instead of waking the person you came to visit, leave a note, and assure him/her of your prayers. So travel with a pen and notecards. There is other advice that says do wake someone up because more times than not they will be glad you did and be sad if they missed you. Use your best judgement and you can ask a caregiver.
- 9. Avoid sitting on the bed.** Sitting on the bed may contribute to pain. Instead sit on a chair and make an effort to be relaxed, establish eye contact and deliver a gentle touch to the person you are visiting on the hand or shoulder if appropriate. Physical touch can be important and some older adults do not experience it often.
- 10. Be Brief!** A good visit is a short visit.
- 11. Speak Up!** Many seniors have hearing impairments and may not be wearing their hearing aids.
- 12. Listen more than you talk.** The one you are visiting should always be the center of your attention. Let them talk if they choose. Ask them to tell you what's been going on in their lives. Self-expression helps to reduce anxiety. Tell them the church community is thinking of them.
- 13. Respect Privacy!** During hospital visits, leave immediately if a physician enters the room. Quietly tell the person that you will return shortly. People may not want others to know their diagnosis and it's not your place to be there. Remember HIPAA. Keep confidentiality.
- 14. Before leaving, pray a short prayer asking a blessing upon the older adult.** A prayer brings a positive closure to the visit. This is appropriate and always appreciated. Ask if they would like both of you to take a turn praying or if they would like you to pray for them. If appropriate hold hands or lay your hand on the person's arm. If others are present, ask them if they want to join.

When praying consider including:

- Thanksgiving for the gifts of life, for the doctors, nurses, staff, for family members present or absent, and for good and happy things that you have talked about during the visit. Definitely thank God for the person you are praying with.
- Asking for health, and strength, and comfort, and for particular things you have been talking about.
- Declaring our trust in God, who sent Jesus Christ to die for us and rise from the dead, and who lives with us still. Declaring our confidence that God is in charge.
- Ending with "Amen" or with "We pray the prayer that Jesus taught, saying..." and say the Lord's Prayer. The person will usually join in.

(Brian Ellison, The Presbyterian Leader)

15. Do not promise to “visit again soon”. It is unfair to make promises that may be hard to keep. You can still make a pencil appointment in your calendar at a future date that can be confirmed later. Do pass on any important information to the pastor and other leaders at the church which is not confidential.

Resources referenced:

- *Older Adult Visitation* by Rev. Mike Fonfara in the [POAMN Planning Guide; 2022](#) (pg. 21)
- *Rules for Hospital Visitation* by Rev. Adrian Doll in the [Board of Deacon Training Manual; 2023](#).
- *Visitation: The most Sacred Time* – Nassau Presbyterian Church based on Brian Ellison, Presbyterian Leader, 2011

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