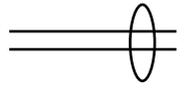


# Pastoral Care and Ways of Visiting



## Session Starter Number 4

### Prayer:

God of grace, we give thanks for this congregation of your people that has been entrusted to our care. By the power of your Holy Spirit, enable us to find effective ways to listen to their joy and sorrow, to offer words of comfort and guidance, and to reach out to them with compassion and friendship. Bless us, we humbly pray, as we meet together now, in the name and ministry of Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

### Introduction:

Chapter 3 of the Book of Forms deals with matters relating directly to the ministry of sessions within The Presbyterian Church in Canada.

Section 109.4 states,

The session shall assign the names of all members and adherents to the elders who shall keep a list of the names and addresses of those assigned to them, and shall cultivate a personal relationship with those persons through visiting, counselling and encouraging them in the Christian life.

This section of the Book of Forms was also quoted in Session Starter number 3 in which the reflection focused on the importance of the Elder's District. Today the focus will be on ways of connecting with the people in the Elder's District.

**Scripture:** (Invite an elder to read the following passage.)

One of the scribes came near and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that he answered them well, he asked him, 'Which commandment is the first of all?' Jesus answered, 'The first is, "Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength." The second is this, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." There is no other commandment greater than these.'

Mark 12:28-31 NRSV

**A Brief Commentary:** (Invite another elder to read the following commentary)

In this famous exchange, Jesus summarizes the law in the words of Deuteronomy 6:5 with Leviticus 19:18. Love for God and neighbour lies at the heart of what it means to be Christian. The second commandment helps define the first. We show our love for God when we love one another. This is a high calling and we often fall short of it. Thanks be to God for embracing grace that pardons our failures. Still, Jesus calls his followers to love neighbours by offering genuine respect, patience, kindness, support, encouragement, forgiveness and the like.

## Reflection:

One of the ways elders can demonstrate love for God and neighbour within the church is by cultivating personal relationships with members and adherents through visiting. There are at least three reasons, however, why this is not always a simple task.

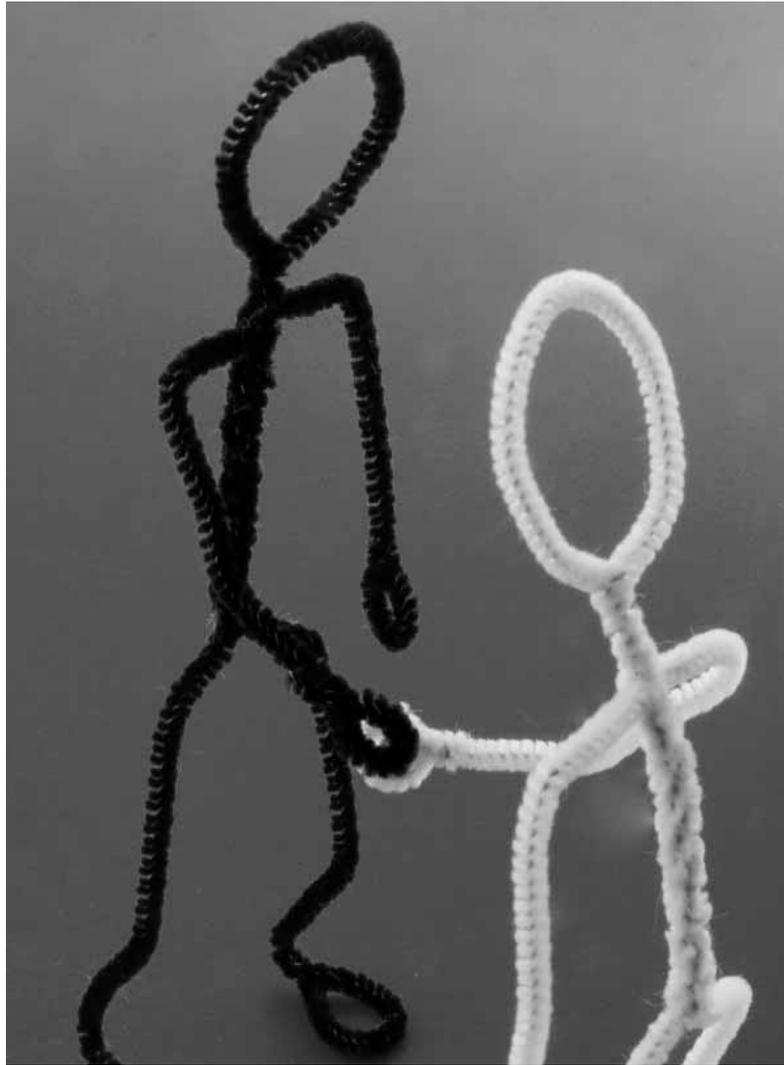
First, while there are elders who love to call on the members and adherents of the congregation, there are others who shudder at the very thought of arranging a visit. These elders tend not to contact their district and, therefore, do not get to know those entrusted to them.

Second, people seem to be busier and more active than ever. Even those elders who are pleased to make pastoral calls frequently find it difficult to arrange get-togethers. Trying to fit a visit between work and cottage, bridge club and Bible Study, hockey games and dance classes is a challenge to say the least.

Third, while some people are always glad to have company, others don't want to be visited. They might worship on Sundays and be involved in other activities in the church, but for reasons, maybe only known to themselves, they refuse to let an elder past the doorstep.

There may be little choice but to accept the reality of the third scenario, however elders need to recognize that it is important to get to know and keep in touch with the people we are leading and serving whenever possible. Consequently, it is necessary for sessions to find ways to overcome barriers to communication.

Most would agree there is no substitute for a face-to-face visit. Communication is as much a visual experience as it is an auditory one. The most effective way of building rapport is when a visit can be held in a person's home or the local coffee shop or even a park bench. Although likely less productive than a "private visit", elders can also connect with the people of their district in church or other places in the community where they happen to meet. Even one face-to-face meeting a year is better than none at all.





Telephone or email communication provides an alternate way to “visit”. A quick call to convey news of an event at the church or simply to ask how things are going, can be a helpful means of expressing interest. Many people use email regularly and might appreciate knowing they can exchange ideas and concerns with their elder this way. Some elders send out, or deliver, invitations to their members



and adherents before communion services or other special events at the church. Adding a thoughtful note to the invitation will personalize it. Sending birthday and Christmas cards is another way of keeping in touch. Elders with the gift of hospitality have found inviting members from the district to their own home for a barbecue or coffee and dessert to be a wonderful experience. It serves a dual purpose of allowing the members to get to know one another as well as developing connections with the elder.

### **Question Suggestions:**

(Together or in small groups, invite the elders to discuss the following questions.)

1. What makes it difficult for elders in our church to visit the members and adherents in the congregation?
2. What visiting methods have worked well?
3. Why is it important for elders to cultivate relationships with the congregation?