Once preliminary training has taken place, the next step could involve the visitor being **mentored**. This mentorship can be done by either existing, experienced visitors or by the parish clergy. The visitors-in-training would get hands-on experience by attending, and observing, visits between the clergy/experienced visitors and the visitee. The final step of the training process should involve **ongoing support,** such as group meetings which provide accountability, mutual mentoring, and continued learning.

At the end of the process potential visitors will have been approached; have a sense of what they are being asked to do; they will have made a commitment to carry out the visiting and engage in all responsibilities of this ministry; they will have been screened, trained, and mentored. As a final step, it might be helpful for both visitors and parish if the candidates are **formally commissioned** in their ministry during a Sunday service. A rite would allow for the parish and ministry leadership to publically acknowledge the important work which is about to be undertaken. Simultaneously, this commissioning also empowers the visitors to feel a part of God's greater workings in a specific way. (See the book of "Occasional Celebrations.") Additionally, Parishes may wish to give each official visitor **an identification badge**, including the parish name and contact info.

Both Lay Pastoral and Friendly Visiting enables the church to operate as a vehicle of God's grace to those who need it most.[1] As followers of the suffering Servant we are called to reach out to, and care for, those who suffer.[2]

> ***"I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me…Just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me." – Matt. 25:36b,c,70***

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[1] Peel, Donald. "The Ministry of Listening: Team Visiting in Hospital and Home." ABC, 1980. P. 17

IDENTIFYING LAY PASTORAL VISITORS



> ***Are any among you suffering? They should pray. Are any cheerful? They should sing songs of praise. Are any among you sick? They should call for the elders of the church and have them pray over them, anointing them with oil in the name of the Lord. The prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise them up…" - James 5:13-15a***

Identifying and approaching parishioners to uphold the sacred responsibility of visiting other parishioners who are sick, infirmed, distressed, hospitalized and shut-in can seem like a daunting task. This brief resource was compiled and written for clergy with the hope that such a task, with clear and simple guidelines, can be made a little easier.

There are two basic types of parish visiting in which lay people might be involved: **(1) Friendly Visiting and (2) Pastoral Visiting.** Before asking potential candidates to undertake this ministry it is important to have a specific *visiting ministry description* in place for both Friendly and Pastoral Lay Visiting. To have a clear volunteer description of each job in place, before filling the position, allows for expectations to be set from the very beginning. The position description should outline such things as: compliance with any required Diocesan SafeRChurch screening and background checks, a willingness to commit to the process of training, devotion of time, expectations around visiting and follow up meetings, as well as expectations around reporting pastoral concerns to the rector and a clear expectation of confidentiality.

[2] Baxter. Paragraph 3.

Any potential visitor should be seen as an individual with a **wholesome character**, who has **a sense of call** or passion for this particular area of ministry. Candidates should not be coerced into such ministry out of a sense of obligation "because no one else will do it." Perhaps most importantly, for the lay visitor, there should be a sense by the individual that God is working in and through them. It is important that the prospective visitor see themselves as joining God where God already is. Such an understanding helps to alleviate the burden of anxiety, and helps to quell the concern of, "Am I good enough?"[3]

To begin the **process of identifying** Friendly and Pastoral visitors amongst your congregational members, parish leadership might employ one of two methods: (1) The personal approach or (2) general appeal.

Many Clergy in our Diocese find that identifying parish visitors is largely intuitive. They identify people in their parish for visiting by way of observation. For example, they look at who others in the parish naturally "go to" for a shoulder to cry on or a listening ear. A clergy might select a potential visitor by looking at who might already be engaging in this ministry informally. For example, those who "check in" on others when someone is missing from worship or those who deliver bulletins or provide transportation to fellow parishioners so that they may attend worship.

The second method of identifying potential visitors is by putting out a general parish-wide appeal. This can be done by explaining the ministry of visiting to the whole parish and explaining why such a ministry is so valuable. While this might be seen as risky it was noted that when this blanket appeal was utilized it was made clear through the appeal process that not everyone would be selected as a Pastoral Lay Visitor. The parish-wide appeal for recruitment allowed for some gifted parishioners to step forward who might not have been anticipated or identified by the church leadership.

[3] Baxter, Samuel. Hospital Visitation: Some "Do's and Don'ts" Column 1. Paragraphs 4-5.



Whether the parish leadership decides to select potential visitors by way of a blanket appeal or through personal selection, it should be **decided on a person-by-person case** which one of the two types of visiting each candidate might best be suited for. For example, a person best suited for Lay Pastoral Visiting should be someone who can be trusted to keep strict confidences. The person should be a caring individual who can relate well to others, is an active listener and is able to talk with others in meaningful ways.[4] Those who talk about themselves to a large degree (even if friendly) were felt not to be a good fit for pastoral visiting and might be better suited as a friendly visitor. If people are overly chatty then they are probably not able to listen. (See Diocesan resources on Pastoral Lay Visiting and Friendly Lay Visiting for fuller descriptions for each of these respective ministries.)

Once a job description for each visiting ministry is in place and once a method for finding visiting candidates is carried out and all prospects are vetted and screened, it is important to **properly train** the candidates.

Diocesan Clergy noted that having a guest trainer was helpful - someone who was seen as an outside source of expertise, someone who has CPE training, for example. A Hospital Chaplain (active or retired) would be one such suggestion. Parish clergy have also used a variety of other professionals such as: nurses, social workers, other clergy, or seminary professors. Some have used ecumenical resources or held training panels which have been co-led by parish clergy, existing lay visitors or other professionals such as those mentioned above. Attending relevant seminars, workshops, courses, and orientations was also deemed valuable in training lay visitors.

[4] Miller, Herb. "Church Effectiveness Nuggets: Volume 9: How to Develop a Congregational 'Care Team.'" 2009 (Fifth Edition). Page. 9