An official “visitor badge” with the Friendly Visitor’s, name, the sponsoring parish name and the church contact information would be helpful to wear when conducting this ministry. In a culture where security and safety are a priority, this may give assurance to the one being visited and their family members.



Even though Friendly Visiting is more casual in nature, it is still important that you mentally ‘check-in’ before each visit so that you can be the best Visitor possible. Prepare yourself for the unexpected in terms of what you may see, hear, and smell.

The Visitor should keep records of who they visited and when, what the general conversation was about and what activities took place. This will help the Visitor keep each visit straight, which will help with follow-up visits. It also ensures that parishioners are visited in fair and regular intervals so that no one slips through the cracks. As with a Pastoral Visit, if you commit to coming back, schedule a date immediately if appropriate or make note of a date to follow-up.

Lay Friendly Visits may be a brief 15 minutes or up to one hour. It is a good idea to phone them first to ensure they are open to a visit that day. Be sure to monitor your visitee so you don’t tire them out too much. If they already have visitors, it might be best if you return another day.

CONCLUSION: Friendly Visiting is just as important as Pastoral Visiting, but is carried out in a different manner by people with different skills. As with Pastoral Visiting, it is important to know what your job is, what your goals are and what your parameters are - these are determined in consultation with the rector/priest-in-charge. The nature of the conversation will be different from Pastoral to Friendly, but the guidelines about the person being visited and their environment remains the same. Similarly, the Visitor should participate in regular meetings and training with the Visiting team, keep the clergy up to date on visits made, and any particular items that they should be aware of, including a possible need for a pastoral visit or a sacramental need.

Resource Author: The Rev’d Anna Gillis-Hoeg



LAY FRIENDLY VISITING

“Now when Job's three friends heard of all this adversity that had come upon him, they came each one from his own place, … and they made an appointment together to come to sympathize with him and comfort him.” - Job 2:11

While Friendly Visiting is often considered less intimidating than Pastoral Visiting, the value and importance of this ministry should not be underestimated.

WHO: Friendly Visiting is visiting in which an appointed person, is chosen to be an ambassador from their parish to connect and engage with those who may be: unwell; disconnected; new to the community and/or parish; or possibly experiencing a significant life event. Such Visitors should be recruited, screened, trained, and commissioned for service much like Lay Pastoral Visitors.

The resource “Identifying Lay Pastoral Visitors” (for clergy) explains how to identify potential Lay Visitors from within your parish context. Another document called “Lay Pastoral Visiting” gives an overview of that type of visitor, how they should be trained, and tips for how they can operate in your parish. This resource covers a second type of Lay Visiting, referred to as “Friendly Visiting.”



WHAT: Friendly Visiting is a means of support that requires a different approach, focus and skill set from that of pastoral visiting. Friendly Visiting usually does not challenge or delve deep, and is not intended to be of an intimate or vulnerable nature. It may be carried out in teams of two.

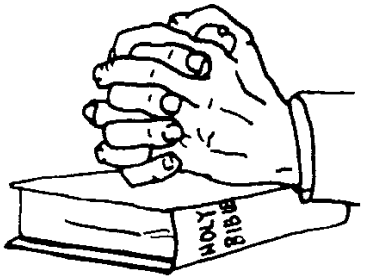
WHEN: Friendly Visiting is a ministry that is parish-based, and functions under the supervision of the clergy. Visitors meet with members of the parish or community on a social level such as bringing someone food, flowers, a card, a church bulletin, or other small mementos, like palm crosses, etc.

WHERE: Visits would likely occur at home, but could also take place at a coffee shop, the local library, or any other location that is comfortable and easy to access by the parties.

WHY: Simple expressions of care and concern during times of uncertainty, trauma, and sickness can make the difference between coping and not, healing and not, having hope or giving up.

HOW (Do's and Don'ts): It is usually casual and conversation is kept light. One might talk about world and community news and events, the weather, or people in general. Aside from conversation, friendly visits can consist of activities such as card or board games, or crafts like knitting or sewing, etc. Like Pastoral Visiting, prayer is also important in Friendly Visiting. If the Visitor is uncomfortable praying extemporaneously, it is perfectly acceptable to read a passage from the Bible, make a selection from a book of prayers for various occasions, or use a prepared prayer. It is important to note that the Visitor should always ask first if prayer is desired or welcome, and accept the answer given, without hesitation or judgement.

Through Friendly Visiting, the parishioner is given comfort via a light, congenial, pleasant and positive atmosphere. The role of the Friendly Visitor is to be helpful through pleasantries and to be entertaining, rather than taking on the pastoral role of comforter and confidant. The ministry of Friendly Visiting can bring much comfort and enjoyment to a parishioner feeling a bit disconnected, out of touch due to illness, or overwhelmed by a recent change in situation. Friendly Visiting helps the parishioner feel supported, connected, and therefore less isolated. It helps the parishioner to maintain a sense of belonging and community. Friendly Visiting is meant to lift the mood of the parishioner and so can be helpful for staving off "the blues" and depression.



Even though Friendly Visiting is not meant to have a deep pastoral tone, that doesn't mean it is any less important for the Visitor to listen for the needs of the parishioner. Remember that even though there is more mutual sharing in a friendly visit, the focus remains on the person being visited. The overall practical expectations of a Friendly Visitor should remain the same as they are for Pastoral Visiting, that is: the Visitor should be neat and tidy in appearance; they should not over-step their bounds or be too nosy. Keeping confidentiality is vital, and they should not burden the person being visited with platitudes, advice, over-sharing, or dwell on distressing matters.

