



M I C H I G A N
M I N I S T R Y
N E T W O R K

VISITATION PLAYBOOK

God has designed us for relationships— not only with Him, but with one another.

“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God.” 2 Corinthians 1:3-4 (NIV)

We are designed to thrive in community, not live in isolation. That is why **[Insert Church Name]** Visitation Team is so vitally important. We are a team that helps people experience loving community in times of joy and in times of difficulty.

“...They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people.” Acts 2:46-47 (NIV)

This Visitation Playbook is here to help you meet the needs of **[Insert Church Name]**. As you read you will discover the following:

- Helpful things to say (and avoid saying)
- Practical ways to show love in different situations and seasons
- When pastoral/care team involvement might be beneficial
- Related and relevant Bible passages to read together and pray together

Deep love grows in communities that care well for one another. Don't miss the opportunity to make a meaningful difference in someone's life. We were created to live and thrive in loving community.

“Love one another with brotherly affection [as members of one family], giving precedence and showing honor to one another... Contribute to the needs of God's people [sharing in the necessities of the saints]; pursue the practice of hospitality. Rejoice with those who rejoice [sharing others' joy], and weep with those who weep [sharing others' grief].” Romans 12:12-15

VISITATION TEAM CONCEPT

Care requires two realities: Life can be difficult...and God can be trusted. If you can demonstrate both, you are representing the truest heart that represents God's nature.

The Visitation Team consists of selected church members, life group leaders who will be official representatives of our church, and pastoral staff. The Visitation Team is trained to support and visit our [\[Insert Church Name\]](#) members and regular attenders who are in hospitals, convalescent centers, nursing facilities, or in their own homes. The purpose of the Team members' visitation is to offer prayer and encouragement by extending the love, comfort, and compassion of Jesus Christ to those who are recovering from illness or medical treatment.

PASTORAL STAFF VISITATION PLAN

Emergency and visitation calls will go through the church phone system. Anyone seeking a visit will call our designated extension. They will be instructed to leave a detailed message with their name, phone number, and explanation of the emergency. This message will automatically notify the pastor who is "On Call." The "On Call" pastor will evaluate the situation and respond appropriately. If it is a genuine emergency, the "On Call" pastor will go immediately to where the emergency is. If it is a life-or-death situation, the "On Call" pastor will contact those who need to be involved and inform them of the emergency.

The pastors on staff at [\[Insert Church Name\]](#) will rotate being "On Call," weekly, beginning Monday and running through Sunday.

VISITATION TEAM FOLLOW-UP PLAN

The Visitation Team will be in place to follow up with individuals who have extended hospital, rehabilitation center, or nursing home stays. The team Leader will direct these assignments and activities.

WHO NEEDS TO BE VISITED?

While everyone could be included, there are certain individuals who especially need to be reminded that they are remembered and not forgotten by the people of the church. They may feel rather lonely at times:

- elderly or disabled people living independently, especially if they are shut ins.
- elderly or disabled people living in nursing homes.
- people who are sick for prolonged periods of time
- people who are hospitalized for life-threatening or longer-term recovery
- people who are bereaved

*Although the list could be more extensive, at this time, ministry will primarily be offered to those listed above.

WHAT SHOULD HAPPEN IN A TYPICAL VISIT?

Fear of not knowing what to say or do is a major obstacle that stops people from making visits. It isn't necessary to have a detailed plan for visiting someone. Often, just being there matters more than what's said or done. A person's presence shows care, which is the main goal when visiting someone in need.

Listening shows respect. Give the person you're visiting a chance to share their story or talk about whatever they want. It's important to resist the urge to interrupt and talk about your experience or about your friend, coworker, relative, parent, or neighbor who might have gone through something similar. Be courteous and focus your attention on them, not yourself!

- Spend most of your time listening.
- Be sensitive with what you say (i.e., avoid telling stories of people in similar situations).
 - PLEASE SEE THE APPENDIX "THINGS TO SAY OR NOT SAY"
- Remember that you are there for them and not for yourself; so be respectful and giving.
- Extend the gift of touch, when appropriate-ask first.
- Offer to pray with or for them.

SCRIPTURE WE CAN PUT INTO PRACTICE

“A cheerful look brings joy to the heart, and good news gives health to the bones.”

Proverbs 15:30

Smile! The way you look can affect an individual’s heart, and the content of what you say (good news) can help bring health to their bones. “Hello. It’s good to see you, John,” might be an appropriate greeting when entering a hospital room.

“Pleasant words are a honeycomb, sweet to the soul and healing to the bones.”

Proverbs 16:24

The words we choose to say can impact the soul and body of others. We hold a strong influence over each other and should be careful about how we might uplift one another.

For example, the person you are visiting ***might*** say, “The doctor said that my cancer is inoperable.”

EXAMPLE #1: “I’m sorry to hear that your prognosis is bad.”

OUTCOME #1: This redirects the focus toward *you* and *your feelings*. This can be awkward because it could make the person feel that *they* have to comfort *you*. Keep the focus of the conversation on the person you are visiting.

EXAMPLE #2: “Yes, I heard the bad news. You must feel terrible, you look pale (or tired).”

OUTCOME #2: This remark keeps the focus on the person but is quite *negative*.

Instead, it might be best to say, “That must be difficult news for you to hear. If you would like to talk about it, I’m here to listen. If you prefer not to talk at this time, I respect that and just want you to know that I care for you.”

HELPFUL GUIDELINES WHEN VISITING

“So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.”
Isaiah 41:10

We all face difficulties in life. The Bible tells us that we will have trials of many kinds, but we are not to fear or be dismayed. God is our strength and a very present help in times of trouble. He wants to be the one to whom we run to and to be our source of strength and comfort. **Your primary role is to provide support to individuals during difficult times.**

“I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.” – Matthew 25:36

Depending on where or when you are visiting an individual and their situation, the following can be helpful in knowing what and what not to do.

PLEASE...

- Check in at the front desk before visiting the patient. You might want to use the antibacterial gel or foam available at the desk or mounted on the walls to help prevent the spread of germs.
- If the door to the room of the person you seek to visit is closed, it is *imperative* that you ask a nurse or qualified staff member for permission to enter. When permission is granted, or if the door is open, please knock lightly before entering, and say the person's name, your name, and then ask for permission to enter.

For example, “Mrs. Jones? It's Rebecca from [\[Insert Church Name\]](#). May I come in?” This is important because they may need a minute to prepare for visitors, and you don't want to cause surprise or embarrassment!

- Use a low, quiet voice when talking with the person you are visiting. Sound travels right through the screen room dividers!
- If possible, sit where you can maintain comfortable eye contact with the patient.
- Let the patient know he/she can talk about sensitive subjects.
- Read the room. If appropriate or needed, be cheerful and have pleasant conversation. If there is a more solemn feeling, be respectful and tactful.
- Listen attentively by giving the patient your undivided attention.

- Ask the patient if they would like you to leave if their physician arrives during your visit. If the patient says they would like you to step out, please excuse yourself politely and immediately. If they ask you to stay, you may do so.

PLEASE...

- **DO NOT...** awaken the patient without permission from a nurse or care giver.
- **DO NOT...** appear startled at what you might hear, see, or smell: open wounds, uncovered patients, crying, screaming, etc.
- **DO NOT...** be insulted by the patient's words/attitudes.
- **DO NOT...** stay Long. Limit visits to short durations. A typical visit should last no longer than ten to fifteen minutes at most. The patient is there to rest — not to entertain guests or be entertained. Please note: Lingering visitors can be exhausting for someone who's recovering.
- **DO NOT...** give medical advice to the person you are visiting, or to their family, offer false optimism, or engage in criticism of the doctor or the treatment.
- **DO NOT...** share any patient medical information with anyone, at any time. It is against HIPAA laws to share anyone's medical details. We do not include people's names or list their conditions on *any* email lists, social media, or prayer chains. We always respect the law and individuals' rights to medical privacy. The best way for someone to receive prayer is for them (or their family members) to post in our [\[Insert Church Name\]](#) Facebook group.
- **DO NOT...** touch the equipment or sit on the patient's bed.
- **DO NOT...** help the patient get out of bed or give food or drink without a nurse's approval.
- **DO NOT...** tell the patient unpleasant news - including your own troubles.
- **DO NOT...** whisper or talk about the patient's condition with family members in the room. Step outside, if necessary, when talking to family members or medical staff.
- **DO NOT...** share ANY patient medical information with anyone at any time.
- **DO NOT...** contact the patient's family unless the patient requests it. If you are asked to contact their family, do not share any medical information with them.

- **DO NOT...** commit or offer for the church to assist financially, provide meals, or give other contributions. If assistance is requested, please direct the patient (or patient's family) to contact their life group or, if they do not have a life group, the church office to ask about any additional help that may be available or needed.

GROUP SUPPORT

- Be considerate of the timing of your visit. Contact the patient or a close family member to find out the best time to come by.
- If possible, assign one member of the individual's life group to organize the meetings with the person to establish a consistent visitation schedule.

HOW TO PRAY FOR HEALING

God can heal in various ways. The following are some examples:

Medically: with the help of medical professionals (surgically and/or with medications, etc.).

Miraculously: instantly through God's mighty power.

Progressively: measurable progress over time.

When entering a room, ask the patient how they would like you to pray. Pray according to what they ask for, which may include (in the case of end-of-life issues) for God to take them quickly. In such a case, pray only the following things:

- That God would give them comfort and peace as they face eternity.
- That God would give them grace to not face an elongated process.
- That God would take them to be home with Him soon.

When praying with people who have asked for healing, pray only the following things:

- That God would help them get better quickly and heal their body.
- That they would sense God's presence through their time there.
- That the doctors, nurses, and everyone who cares for them would have wisdom in developing and implementing the treatment plan.
- That they would know that they are not alone during this time.

Note: we never “pronounce” anyone healed during or after prayer. Instead, we humbly “ask” God to mercifully bestow healing and wholeness to the person for whom we are praying.

Remember to thank the person for the opportunity to pray together and let them know that you will personally continue to pray for them and for their recovery.

FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE

“Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” Philippians 4:6-7

We know at times that either through unforeseen circumstances such as job loss, medical costs, etc. or bad financial decisions, individuals or families may find themselves struggling to make ends meet. To address a variety of situations regarding financial assistance, the [Insert Church Name] Church leadership has established guidelines outlined below to assist an individual or family.

THINGS TO SAY/DO

- Pray with them.
- In some situations, if the need is small, you may want to consider how that individual’s life group can assist the need before turning to the church’s benevolence funds. *We do not expect a life group or team to support an individual in financial difficulties to a significant degree.*
- Encourage the individual or family to apply for Benevolence Assistance by contacting the church office. The office will then direct them through the process of requesting assistance.
- You also may want to encourage them to attend a Financial Peace life group. This is an excellent class to help them with their financial situation.

THINGS TO AVOID SAYING/DOING

- Never make any promises, on behalf of yourself or the church, for financial assistance.

Benevolence Request Process

To be considered for help, a person must fill out the assistance application. A person must contact the church office to request support. The Request for Assistance application will be given (emailed) to the individual requesting help. Once it is returned to the Church Office it will be sent to the Helps Committee. Once a decision has been reached, the individual will be contacted and informed of the decision. The process takes approximately 72 hours.

NOTE: The church office does not process requests unless they are made by the individual in need. Please do not call on behalf of the individual; rather, direct them to take action themselves.

RESPONSIBILITY

It's very important that as we care for people, we understand the difference between being responsible "FOR" versus responsible "TO". Fixing or parenting individuals is not our responsibility. Christians can get confused when we equate being responsible FOR others with being responsible TO others. Being responsible FOR is unhealthy. Being responsible TO others is a healthy approach to care.

RESPONSIBLE FOR.....RESPONSIBLE TO

Listening for Heaven's Sake by Dr. Gary Sweeten, David Ping & Anne Clippard

When I feel responsible FOR others	When I feel responsible TO others
I... ☐ Fix ☐ Protect ☐ Rescue ☐ Control ☐ Carry their feelings ☐ Don't listen I FEEL... ☐ Tired ☐ Anxious ☐ Fearful ☐ Liable I AM CONCERNED WITH... ☐ The solution ☐ Details ☐ Answers ☐ Circumstances ☐ Being right ☐ Performance I AM A MANIPULATOR I EXPECT THE PERSON TO LIVE UP TO MY EXPECTATIONS	I... ☐ Show empathy ☐ Encourage ☐ Share ☐ Confront ☐ Am sensitive ☐ Listen I FEEL... ☐ Relaxed ☐ Free ☐ Aware ☐ High self-worth I AM CONCERNED WITH... ☐ Relating person to person as an equal to others ☐ Listening to feelings and thoughts ☐ Respecting the person I AM A HELPER / GUIDE I CAN TRUST AND LET GO

APPENDIX

THINGS TO SAY AND NOT SAY

WHEN A SPOUSE PASSES AWAY

THINGS YOU CAN SAY

Sometimes the best thing to say is nothing. Your presence and tears can say more than your words.

- *"I'm so sorry- this is a terrible loss."* This is better than simply saying, "I'm so sorry;" that last phrase helps validate and share in that person's grief.
- *"I'm here for you. Can I call you in a few days?"* Grieving people may have trouble asking for help, so it is helpful to take responsibility for contact and follow through.
- *"May we bring you a meal Tuesday?"* or *"We would like to rake the leaves in your yard Saturday- is that okay with you?"* instead of "If there's anything I can do, just ask."

THINGS TO AVOID SAYING:

- *"Your spouse is in heaven."* Even if this is true, it doesn't minimize the loss that the surviving spouse is going through.
- *"Maybe we should have prayed harder."* You never want to make them feel responsible for the death.
- *"Don't worry, God has a new mate for you."* This statement invalidates the need to mourn the loss of a loved one, and implies the person should find comfort in hoping for a replacement spouse.

WHEN A CHILD PASSES AWAY (INCLUDING MISCARRIAGE)

THINGS YOU CAN SAY

Sometimes the best thing to say is nothing. Your presence and tears can say more than your words.

- *"I am so sorry! My heart breaks for you."*
- *"I care about you and am praying for you."*
- *"I don't know what to say. But please know that I'm here for you. We are here to walk through this with you."*
- After an appropriate length of time, you may want to ask, *"How is your marriage doing?"* Losing a child can be very difficult on a marriage, so make sure you are checking in with them and if need be, refer them to their campus pastor.

THINGS TO AVOID SAYING:

- *"God wanted your child with Him."* This statement makes the parents feel as if God is angry with them or is punishing them.
- *"Well, at least you have your other children."*

- *“Everything happens for a reason; God will work this out for good.”*

WHEN TO ENCOURAGE AN INDIVIDUAL TO MEET WITH A PASTOR AND OR A PROFESSIONAL COUNSELOR

- The person has stopped eating or drinking.
- When grief paralyzes the rest of life and prevents the person from caring for themselves, sustaining a job, or taking care of their children.
- The person doesn't leave home for an abnormal period of time.
- The person shows signs of suicidal intent.
- When grief never seems to end- after a natural period of grief the person makes extreme efforts to keep his/her loved one alive.

WHEN A PERSON HAS RECEIVED A DIAGNOSIS OF A TERMINAL ILLNESS

THINGS TO SAY OR DO

- *“It's okay to be angry.”* God desires open dialogue—encourage your friend to let out their true emotions with you and God.
- Keep them focused on God's faithfulness—God is not the author of sickness and disease. He is there with them in the midst of their struggle. He is the Way through every challenge they will face. He is faithful.
- *“We'll see you later when we come back to visit again.”* It's important for your friends to know you won't abandon them when times get tough—it's encouraging to know they can look forward to future times together.
- Encourage them to consult their physicians about any changes in medications rather than making decisions on their own in difficult moments.

THINGS TO AVOID SAYING/DOING

- *“All things work for good through God's plans.”* Though this is true, it may come across wrong to someone going through a terminal illness. They may get the false impression that God wants them to die.
- *“Just believe more, and you won't be angry/will be healed.”* This statement causes guilt and inadequacy. God never uses guilt to inspire faith.

SCRIPTURE REFERENCES

DEATH OF A CHILD OR SPOUSE

The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. "The Lord is my portion," says my soul, "therefore I will hope in him." The Lord is good to those who wait for him, to the soul who seeks him. It is good that one should wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord. Lamentations 3:22-26

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God. 2 Cor. 1:3-4

TERMINAL/SERIOUS ILLNESS

We put our hope in the LORD. He is our help and our shield. In him our hearts rejoice, for we trust in his holy name. Let your unfailing love surround us, LORD, for our hope is in you alone. Psalm 33:20-22

Then Jesus said, "Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle at heart, and you will find rest for your souls. Matthew 11:28-29