

# The Mechanics of Member Visitation

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"A home going pastor makes a church going people." We've heard that expression a number of times throughout our years. In our hearts we know that its true, even though sometimes we may find it tough to get done. We also sense how true it is that involving members in making visits on other members and prospects would be a great blessing in the church. But how can we get that job done? And if we're already doing something, how can we do it better?

NIKE has made millions with its advertizing slogan, "Just do it." Pastor Loren Steele of Immanuel Lutheran Church said the same thing about his church's ministry to the Hmong community in St. Paul, MN. "Just go and do it," he said in the January segment of the WELS connection when urging others to make similar calling efforts. The first thing that comes to mind when talking about a membership visitation program in a congregation is to repeat that encouragement, "Just do it." Of all the things that could be said, and some of them we will attempt to say about the mechanics and specifics of implementing a visitation program in the church, I feel that is an important thing to remember. If we plan and prepare and divide into pairs, but after an initial flare go back to our chairs and do the paperwork thing, we haven't gained much in maintaining contact with our members. On the other hand even if we don't have any organized effort in place to make calls, or involve elders in visiting their fellow members, but still get out that door when we can and see people in their homes, we at least have accomplished something of benefit in the way of visitation. Keep that in mind six months from now after this paper is filed and forgotten. If nothing has happened in your church in the way of mechanics, and you're once again feeling the guilt of not getting all the calls made you would like, and you're wondering whether it will ever change, **just do it.**

This paper, however, is not advocating spontaneity as a strategy for carrying out a visitation program in the church. The old adage "to fail to plan is a plan to fail" haunts the best of intentions even in the church. If we wait for the opportunity to make calls, the time may never come. At least it may not come often or easily enough to make much difference in door bell ringing. There are too many other real legitimate pressing needs to be met. Relying on "when I have time" won't get the job done. One of the most often repeated laments of many pastors is that the visits just don't get made the way they feel they should. And when council members are recruited to help make calls the initial result is more work. Questions like "what do you want me to do?" and "what do I say?" need meaningful answers. Guidance needs to be given. Direction needs to be provided. And understanding of what we are trying to accomplish needs to be communicated. Without such leadership there will be no ownership. The haphazard visitation that results will probably come to an end—often leaving few mourners. Or it may struggle along sporadically not providing nearly the benefits that regular sincere, meaningful visits could be giving. A clean, organized way of calling on members with regular, purposeful visits would be a great blessing to the church.

All of this leads to the conclusion that there may have been some wisdom lurking in the minds of last year's theme committee. From this vantage point, however, their choice of writers is to be regretted. When presented with the theme "The Mechanics of Member Visitation," I initially thought, "That shouldn't be too difficult." Getting all my thoughts down on paper, however, has once again required some work. Several final introductory remarks are in order. The chapter, "The Shepherd Visits the Sheep," from *The Shepherd under Christ* covers the subject of membership visits by the pastor quite extensively. I deemed it unnecessary and unwise to try to reproduce that informative counsel with my more limited insights. For a good review of the types of pastoral calls and advice to be kept in mind when making them, I refer you to those 26 pages. From the explanatory remarks attached to this paper's theme suggestion I concluded that it was safe to limit my direction to the mechanics of setting up a visitation program—things to keep in mind when involving lay people in making visits on other members. I trust the content of this paper can be used satisfactorily, for reference and encouragement by a pastor as he strives to make member calls himself. The focus, however, will be on

including members in an organized, scheduled and prepared way in a program of ongoing congregational visitation.

To give you a sense of direction, I propose to follow four headings in the development of this paper: 1) Setting up a workable visitation program; 2) Preparing for specific visits; 3) Making the visits; 4) Final thoughts and summary. At the risk of appearing trite I will use an acronym memory hitch to divide the material into these four categories. Perhaps this will help a person remember and use some of the thoughts of this paper even after it has been filed away. We proceed, therefore, with:

## **THE R.U.S.H. PROGRAM OF MEMBER VISITATION**

### **1. Setting up a workable visitation program**

**RECOGNIZE** Recognize the need and value of a visitation program. If you want to go to sea, you need to build a ship. And if you want others to join you in building that ship and going to sea, you need to convince them that sailing is fun or that the fishing is good. If nothing else, at least persuade them that the venture will be profitable for their community. In other words putting into place the mechanics of a visitation program starts with convincing your members that it would be a God-pleasing thing to do and would be of great benefit to the spiritual life of their church. This is an important part of the process. And in a congregation of life-long 'land lubbers,' one may not easily get elders or church council members to recognize a God-given role for them in making member visits. If they have never done it before, it may be viewed as something akin to the flu; or worse, like the doctor trying to get his patients to make house calls so that he can go golfing. Even being on the receiving end of member visits may be viewed by many in the congregation with a great deal of alarm. "The pastor and elder want to stop by for a visit? What have we done wrong now?"

In order to convince people of the spiritual need and value of a visitation program use the only means that convinces hearts of spiritual matters. Use the Word. As you desire, have a Bible Class and include application references in sermons. My suggestion is that you start with the smaller circle of people that you want to involve in making member visits. At the beginning of Elders meetings, Evangelism Committee meetings, Church Council, and the like, have devotions and Bible studies on the subject. Don't give just cursory attention to it. Give quality time and discussion to help people see that individual one-on-one contacts through member visits are important.

Use Jesus as an example. Not only did Jesus preach to the multitudes and address church goers at their worship services, he ministered to people's spiritual needs individually. He visited people in their homes. Without appearing contrived we could say Jesus made general pastoral visits in which social and spiritual were combined (Mary and Martha: Luke 10:38-42); sick calls (Simon's mother: Luke 4:38f; The Centurion's servant: Matthew 8:5-7); prospect calls (Zacheus: Luke 19:2ff); evangelism calls (Samaritan woman: John 4:7-40); and delinquent calls (Simon the Pharisee: Luke 7:36, 39, 40). The point might be made that even as Jesus, the Good Shepherd, showed such caring ministry to individuals and was ready to go to them, so pastors as under-shepherds, are to be the ones who follow His example in their care for souls. Certainly, no true 'Seelsorger' would disagree. Pastors, first of all, need to be the ones who take the lead and make visits. Even if no one else follows that lead, he will still recognize his responsibility to minister to the individual needs of souls under his care and be found in their homes whenever he can. The benefits are measurable. The rapport that he builds with the membership and the ability to address the needs of the congregation in more understanding and specific ways will show up in the numbers.

In order to encourage others to be involved in making member visits, Scriptural examples from Jesus' ministry and life in the New Testament church could also be used. Jesus sent out the 70, two by two, and they went to peoples' homes (Luke 10:1ff). The Lord tells Christians to "consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds" and to "encourage one another" (Hebrews 10:24,25). The early Christian Church did that well as the good news was proclaimed both "in the temple courts and from house to house" (Acts 5:42). There was concern for each other as even possessions were shared voluntarily (Acts 4:32). People cared about

each other, helped each other, and spent time with each other in their homes in spiritual concerns (Apollos in the home of Aquilla and Priscilla: Acts 18:26).

With specific Scriptural guidance members will be led to recognize the value and appropriateness of member visits because the Word works. With that realization willingly embraced, the first and most important step in the mechanics of member visitation will be accomplished—ground work in the Word.

**RESPONSIBLE** Once the motivation is there, make certain people responsible for carrying out the visitations. It is a given in this paper that a pastor, himself, is responsible for member visits, by virtue of his call. Sick calls in the hospital, shut-in calls at home, admonition and encouragement calls in the home as he is aware of their need will be accepted as a normal part of his calling. Though that does not demand, it does imply a predetermined schedule of regular visits. Monthly visits are probably the norm when arranging shut-in calls. There is no reference to evangelism/ prospect calls above because this paper is to address member visitation. It is to be acknowledged that such calls will also be accepted as part of the pastor's responsibility as he leads the congregation in carrying out its mission of sharing the Gospel. In most cases, however, the pastor will not be able to make all the visits on members and prospects. Maybe he can't even accomplish very many of all those that ought to be made. He should still accept the responsibility of leading the congregation into a membership visitation program through which this individual ministry to souls gets done.

The mechanics of a member visitation program that works means making other people responsible also. The Church is responsible for the spiritual well being of its own. And in organized ways the church often acts through its elected representatives. In most congregations it will be the elders who are specifically charged with assisting the pastor in making the calls (delinquent, discipline, general, etc.). When elders are elected they need to be aware of and ready to accept this responsibility. The same thing is true of Evangelism Committee members for their outreach work, or Board of Education members for calls within the school program. After elders, or others, have been led to accept this involvement in member visitation, they will need to be held accountable for that involvement. That means lining up specific calls with specific people on specific dates. This is important. Like anything else without specific direction, even the most sincere of intentions can fade. Don't ask a person to carry a gun around without giving him some training on how to shoot that gun, when it's his turn to shoot, and what his target is. Otherwise things can get dangerous. Or a person may simply put the gun down because he's getting tired of holding it. No one is ordering him to the front lines to shoot and so he'd rather go back to the barracks for a game of cards. And so training and then holding a person responsible for specific calls should be part of setting up a workable visitation program.

Perhaps the easiest method of training and maybe most effective is simply to have a visitor accompany the pastor or other experienced visitor in making calls. That way he can observe first hand, learn and participate more fully in successive calls as he feels comfortable. Sending a person out cold, or after only reading a book or training manual, may work in some cases, but in many cases will probably not serve very well to advance the interest of effective and meaningful visitation. Just take them along.

Making visitors responsible is done best when it is carried out as a normal part of the meeting process. After reviewing a list of names of those who could be visited (for various reasons - inactive, general encouragement, prospect, etc.), a visitor takes his turn selecting a date for visits. At the end of his choice he hears, "And you, Bill, have the evening of January 12 as your night for making visits with me. Call me when you have the names and times lined up so we can determine when we need to leave." Generally, it seems to lead to better results to pick a specific date on which visits are to be made, and then a list of names from which to choose. The visitor then keeps telephoning until one or more visits are able to be scheduled for that date. Choosing the person or family to be visited first and not the date, more easily results in calls not being made. "They couldn't make it on that night; and no one was home when I called again; I left a message on their answering machine, but they didn't return the call; and I haven't seen them in church either..." and another month goes by. Of course, there are those people to be visited that will keep putting a pastor or visitor off indefinitely. If the circumstances make that call more urgent, a date will need to be selected to stop by for a visit

unannounced. The important thing is someone needs to be made responsible for carrying through with the program.

**REPORTING** The final step in setting up the mechanics of a visitation program is reporting. It is the natural complement of making someone responsible. The pastor should report his pastoral activities, including visits, to his elders at their monthly meetings and also to church council and voters' assemblies on a regular basis. Elders, council and voters should expect and request such reports if they are not being given. This is not a matter of lack of trust. It is a matter of a servant reporting to those whom he serves what is being done for their service. If members are expected to be concerned about what is going on and responsible for their own church ministry then they need to be informed. Being informed will contribute to greater involvement and ownership of the church's mission on the part of all. When Paul and Barnabas were welcomed by the church at Jerusalem "they reported everything God had done through them" (Acts 15:4). We should do no less.

Elders and others in the congregation who are made responsible for visits should be asked to give reports of their activity also. Who did they call on, when and what were the results of the visit. This should be done on a regularly scheduled basis as part of the normal agenda items of their meetings. If no reports are expected then it can easily be concluded that whether the visits were made or not is not considered important. And pretty soon they won't be. That's the practical side of reporting as a help to a successful visitation program. Knowing that a report will be expected at the next meeting has a way of encouraging a person to get on that phone and get that visit lined up. We all know what marvelous things deadlines can perform. It really isn't very enjoyable to show up a meeting to report, "I didn't get any of my calls made again." But it is satisfying to be able to report the opposite.

Is reporting legalistic pressure? Is it something that forces the flesh to do unwillingly what the new man ought to be doing willingly? I don't think we have to worry about separating the sinner/saint motivations so carefully. God knows what's in the heart. Who of us hasn't needed the third use guidance of the law to channel the proper intentions of the new man? I'd rather describe reporting as a God-pleasing help to the new man to keep the flesh under control. If you want to set up the mechanics of, a visitation program that works requires reporting.

## **2. Preparing for specific visits.**

**URGENCY** The mechanics are in place. Pastor and visitors are responsible for making certain types of calls. Reports will be given. The next step is preparing for specific visits. Which calls should we make? Which ones are more urgent? That is the first page to turn in preparing for specific visits.

If the pastor, alone, is making calls he needs to determine the priority of making a general pastoral call on a member over against making another type of call such as a prospect or delinquent call. Sanctified judgment will be his guide. He should balance concerns of each objectively, not just do whichever is easier. He should keep in mind, however, the thrust of his call. His call includes the general concern of leading his congregation in Gospel outreach (prospect calls). Nevertheless, Christ's directive to be a shepherd to His sheep is a more specific responsibility of his calling and should be kept in mind. Especially is the urgency of warning the erring important. It is a directive of Scripture (Ezekiel 33) which can not be ignored in establishing priorities. James supports the life and death urgency of making such calls. "Remember this: whoever turns a sinner from the error of his way will save him from death and cover over a multitude of sins" (James 5:20).

The difficulty that a pastor has in trying to make all the calls is obvious to anyone who opens his eyes in the church. In many cases it is, literally, impossible to make all the calls that should be made. If there is no help, there will be problems. If the saying is true that "a home going pastor makes a church going people," then the opposite is also true. It should be no wonder when attendance figures and spiritual maturity begin to reflect what is happening - or not happening - in the way of member calls. The realization of this is what leads to papers such as this. The mechanics of member visitation is an important area that can provide untold blessings for the church.

When members are involved as visitors in making calls they too will need to determine which calls are more urgent than others. Here we no longer have the need of balancing prospect vs. pastoral, or delinquent vs. shut-in. Evangelism committee members will consider in their meeting the names of church visitors and contacts that they have developed and determine which ones are more urgent. The Board of Education will consider in their meeting which calls of school related nature are more pressing in nature and assign accordingly. Elders will do the same for general membership calls. Elders will need to keep in mind the urgency of discipline related calls as referred to earlier. Yet not all cases of inactivity among members ought to be considered equal. If a lukewarm member has already been visited this year and acknowledged he ought to be coming, but so far has shown up only once, maybe visiting him again is not as urgent as other visits. To keep on repeating visits to him and others like him at the expense of never making any general membership visits on those in good standing would not be wise either. Remember the adage "an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure."

An active middle-aged to elderly couple was visited and the visit was well received. Specific questions were discussed about church life, worship services and family members. The conversation was friendly and there was obvious appreciation for the interest shown. Everything was fine. Towards the end of the visit they were urged to make sure they share any concerns they might have in the future. "There is one thing I'd like to say" was the response. "I don't like the shepherding program! You're my shepherd and if I have something I need to talk about, I want to go to my pastor with it, not someone else." An explanation was given and accepted. A misunderstanding was cleared up and everything was left in good order. Who knows what might have developed into a bigger problem, and hard feelings and possible inactivity and delinquent visits? Maybe nothing. The couple demonstrated a fine Christian spirit and may well not have allowed that to become a problem anyway. But now it won't. A general pastoral visit provided a good spiritual blessing for the church. Maintaining good contact and good spirit among those who are active goes a long way in preventing spiritual lukewarmness and inactivity from resulting. This should be kept in mind when establishing the urgency and priority of calls.

**UNDERSTANDING** In preparation for visits efforts should be made to understand the family life and spiritual state of the person being visited.

Some calls will be cold calls. When making prospect calls it will be evident that most of the time not much will be known, about the family or their spiritual state. What is known - from a referral letter or a members acquaintance, or the evidence of their desire to visit services - should be shared. However, people do not expect you to know much about them if they are not members. Lack of knowledge about their family/church life will not surprise or bother them. Lack of understanding in relating to them as you become acquainted will. Don't make visits with preconceived mind sets about what people will be like or why they behave the way they do. Keeping in mind Scriptural truth about law and Gospel, sinful nature and the Spirit's work, be prepared to meet them where they are in life. "I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some," Paul says (I Cor. 9:22).

It is a different matter when visiting members. There still may be some patience shown by members to fellow members if they are not acquainted. But not always. The omniscience sometimes expected of a pastor (why didn't you visit me when I was in the hospital) may on occasion be expected also of visiting members (You know why we haven't been coming). *Faux pas* don't usually sit too well with a member who is already becoming lukewarm to the church because of its perceived lack of concern. Failing to know, for example, that a particular child in a the family is not the offspring of the husband, but of a previous marriage or an illegitimate birth, may lead to some embarrassing moments if the child is described as just like his dad (the husband). It may not be too well received either if a visitor has had frequent contact with a family in church, but still can't remember the name of a spouse or children when he visits them. Look it up ahead of time. When confronted with a situation where you don't know something that you should know, don't pretend. Admit it and gain some measure of respect for not being a fake.

Gaining understanding about a person/family should be done of course, within the boundaries of the Eighth Commandment. Never gossip or give any credence to hearsay. Respect reputation. Honor confidentiality of the past. At meetings and in conversation with others discuss information about a family to be visited only in an objective way. Your goal is to better understand their circumstance in life so that you can better address their spiritual needs in your visit. The mechanics of preparing for visits include gaining an understanding of those to be visited.

**UPHOLD** Uphold, common courtesy. The mechanics of a good visitation program should direct visitors to practice the kind of common courtesy that they would expect themselves.

The preparations to be made in advance of a visit should include making arrangements for the visit ahead of time. This may not always need to be strictly adhered to. As mentioned earlier, if a call urgently needs to be made and the person keeps putting the visitor off, then the time comes when you go unannounced. Even then, if the family has other friends visiting at the moment, or is involved in some activity that would mean your visit legitimately would be an inconvenience, then come back again. They'll get the message that you are serious about visiting and may finally agree to a visit the next time. That's easier for them to do than to have to tell you to go away in order to get you off their doorstep.

In most other circumstances, however, making arrangements to stop by for a visit ahead of time is the socially responsible thing to do. Gone are the days for most areas of the country when anyone was welcome to stop by any time. Now, some kind of advance warning is appreciated, if nothing else to get the house picked up or curlers out of the hair. Besides that, in most cases, kids in extra curricular activities, late hours at work, and other busy schedules are facts of life. A visit has a much greater chance of being well received and accomplishing some meaningful dialogue if it is arranged ahead of time. A practical help: if pastor and elder are going on a visit together have the elder arrange the visit (one a day agreed upon at the meeting). It saves sometimes numerous phone calls for the pastor in his busy schedule; and it helps keep the elder who is responsible in charge of his own visits. Once the visit has been arranged, be on time. Once the purpose of the visit has been completed, leave. The preparation for a good member visit should uphold principles of common courtesy when arranging the visit.

### **3. Making the Visits.**

**SINCERE** There is no substitute for love. Be sincere in the calls you make. The Bible says in a number of places that Jesus was "moved with compassion" when he dealt with people. We should be too. Visitors are to let the love of God be reflected in them when they make their visits. They are to be making their visits, not just because they have a job to do and a report to give, but because they do care about the people on whom they are calling. People have a way of sensing whether other people really care or are just pretending. Don't be artificial; strive to be genuine. If you genuinely care for people, you won't just go through the motions, but you will show your caring spirit in the way you relate to them.

Of course, visitors won't be sincere just because they are told to be. The Law does not motivate, the Gospel does. But, generally, visitors are those who have agreed to make calls because their faith has moved them to help. They do care. A third use of the Law as a reminder to be sincere will help them remember its importance. The positive impact that they see their visits are having, in most cases, will encourage them. When calls are made, remember to be sincere.

**SPECIFIC** Have a specific purpose in mind when visits are made. The type of call will, of course, determine the purpose in general. Evangelism calls will be concerned about reaching out with the Gospel and discipline calls will warn about the damning results of impenitence. Within the framework of a general purpose, however, it's good to have a specific purpose in mind. "We had the opportunity to share the Gospel with this couple last time (Great Exchange, TAS, etc.). This visit let's make sure we talk about their children and our Savior's love for children, also. If the situation presents itself we'll try to talk about Baptism." Or, on an

inactive member call: "We've heard they apparently had a problem with the school decision that was made at a voters' meeting last year. Let's see if we can tactfully get them to open up about why they feel the way they do."

General pastoral calls will also be more beneficial when made with a specific purpose in mind. It is not a bad idea to have that specific purpose be general interest. Interest in their lives, keeping the lines of communication open, general encouragement in Christian faith, are good goals. If that is the case, then it is best simply to say. "We're here to show our interest in your life and talk about our church for a little while." "We just want to keep the lines of communication open and give you a chance to talk about anything you might like to talk about in our church." Many times a specific item of current interest in the church will be a good choice to use as a purpose of the visit. "How do you feel about the different order of service we've tried several times?" "What do you think about the idea of a new sound system?" Be clear that you are interested in hearing their feelings. Don't patronize, however, or promise that things will be done the way they want. They may not. Just assure them that their views will be fairly heard and considered with others. People will feel more comfortable with the visit and have a greater sense that the visit is worthwhile if you are clear about a specific purpose.

**SPIRITUAL** By all means keep your visit focused on spiritual matters. The ones being visited are church members (unless a prospect call) and you are a visitor from the church. Pay attention to the business of the Church—the concerns of the soul.

Social amenities are, of course, to be expected. "How have you been?" "You have a beautiful home!" Too much small talk seems affected, however. People get the impression you are hesitant to get to the point. It's easier to engage in social interchange if there is a common interest to talk about. "So, you golf, too? ...an article I read about cholesterol said..." "The last time I tried to wallpaper..." Yet, the purpose of the visit can be minimized if the visitor spends too much time with such social interchange. Get to the reason you are visiting, especially if you've lined up a second or third call that night. And that reason should be spiritual in nature.

The specific purpose you have established for the visit will be spiritual in nature. That purpose may need to emphasize the Law more in some calls so that increased spiritual life through the Gospel might be served. If it is needed, speak the Law clearly. "You know in your heart that it's wrong," "God is clear in His Word that that is sin," is to be preferred over softening tones like, "That really shouldn't be..." or "Do you feel that's God's way for people to live?" Don't minimize sin, but speak the truth in love. When the first use of the Law to admonish sin is not needed, the 3rd use of the Law to guide intermingled with the joy of the Gospel to motivate, or, in some cases, the Gospel standing alone with all its blessings is to be incorporated naturally into the conversation. Do not be hesitant to talk religion. This is a church visit. Members may think it odd if you don't, or if you bring up spiritual matters only in kind of an apologetic way.

By all means, don't be afraid to talk about Jesus. If we don't talk about our Lord and all that His grace means for our lives, *who will?* You'd be amazed (or hopefully you won't be) at the number of different ways the Lord enables us to bring simple, Gospel truths into the conversation. "And isn't it wonderful that you and I can have that assurance of forgiveness because of what our Lord has done for us?" "It makes all the difference in the world doesn't it to be able to face an uncertain future in this world knowing that we have God's certain promise of heaven waiting for us in the next life?" "How thankful we can be that we can enjoy God's peace and security through Christ as an everyday part of our lives." The opportunities to talk about God's grace to us in Christ, in prayer, comfort, hope, confidence, peace, joy, certainty, strength, are as many and varied as the circumstances of life itself. Use them. Talk about Jesus. Make sure your visit is spiritual.

#### **4. Final Thoughts and Summary**

**HABIT** It is to be hoped that the mechanics of a member visitation program become such an established part of congregational life that it becomes habit, second nature, a normal and accepted part of congregation life. More than just a hope, it should become a goal. When one pastor leaves the church and another pastor comes the visitation of members should continue. The level of activity in visiting members and prospects should not rise and fall drastically depending on the interest and strengths (or weaknesses) of each pastor. Think of how

much you appreciated it (if you are a pastor) if you came into a congregation and a normal routine of members being involved in making visits was already in place. You didn't have to start from scratch. You didn't have to convince and cajole. You didn't have to develop a member visitation program gradually and work hard to keep it going. You just came on board and stayed the course. What a wonderful blessing. Keep it going.

If the mechanics of a member visitation program are not in place in your congregation, strive to make it a priority. If nothing else, follow the advice given at the beginning of this paper and "just do it." Follow the exhortation of Scripture and just "go." Don't try to start big with everything all in place at once. Start small and build. The Spirit usually works through steady growth, not big bangs. Provide enthusiastic leadership and Gospel encouragement. Keep it going in your life, so that it becomes also a habit in congregational life. We want our members to have the good habit of hearing the Word regularly and not having to decide whether they are going to church. Let's put the shoe on the other foot. Reach the point where we don't have to decide whether or not calls are going to be made. We just go. Our effort is expended on preparation for specific calls on specific dates—out of habit.

**HEAVEN** Let's not lose sight of our ultimate reason for making visits: heaven. Really, everything we do in the church has that as its underlying purpose: helping people headed for heaven. The Bible says, "For here we do not have an enduring city, but we are looking for the city that is to come" (Heb. 13:14). "Our citizenship is in heaven" (Phil. 3:20). We are runners in the race of life who are not looking at our feet, but the horizon. Even though we have to watch our step to avoid the rocks and potholes and wipe the sweat out of our eyes from exertion, we still concentrate on reaching the finish line. Our eternal destiny in Christ is always before us.

And we encourage each other. Sometimes we are trying to recruit another runner to join the race; sometimes we strongly exhort another runner when he seems like he might be ready to give up and quit running; sometimes we simply run side by side for awhile talking about the race and our training. "Let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the day approaching" (Heb. 10:25). We encourage each other by not giving up meeting together in public worship. We encourage each other by showing individual concern for souls from house to house. And what a joy it will be when we who have been in each others homes to encourage one another now, can enjoy life together hereafter in the eternal home of glory our Lord has prepared for us. That's why we strive to carry out the mechanics of a member visitation program—because of heaven.

## **HELPS**

### ***Other Reading***

Clement, Arthur J. *The Shepherd's Assistants*, Graphics Arts Department, D.M.L.C. New Ulm, Minnesota, 1989, 223 pages.

Schuetze and Habeck. *The Shepherd Under Christ* Chapter 6. The Shepherd Visits the Sheep, Northwestern Publishing House, Milwaukee, WI 1974, 389 pages.

### ***Materials Available through N.P.H.***

Talk About the Savior - Evangelism

Regaining the Straining - Sequel to TAS for elders use with inactive

Witnesses series



Study to Be Witnesses  
Organize to be Witnesses  
Train to be Witnesses

Canvassing tracts (3 pages each)  
Instructions to canvassers.  
Canvassing tips for the pastor.

Sonnenberg, Steve     *Challenged to Serve: Equipping Elders for Ministry* (Binder lessons with video) Sessions 4 and 5. Making Elder calls/visiting members, parts 1 and 2; Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis, MO 1988.