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EMPOWERING THE LAITY FOR THE MINISTRY OF VISITATION

**Assessing the Program of Visitation in the Local Church
First Baptist Church, Dartmouth, N.S.**

by

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**Submitted to the Faculty of Theology, Acadia Divinity College,
in partial fulfilment of the requirements for
the Degree of Doctor of Ministry**

**Acadia Divinity College,
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Fall Convocation 1999**

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ABSTRACT

The Bible highlights the vital role of visitation in the life of the believer. James writes, "Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction. (Jas. 1:27). This thesis explores the value of an effective and sustainable lay visitation program in the local church. A carefully planned and implemented visitation ministry contributes to the building of a healthy church and enhances its outreach to the community.

The biblical and theological foundations for visitation should undergird any program. A continuing account of God visiting and redeeming his people is revealed in the biblical record. Jesus, in his actions and teachings, provides a model and mandate of visitation for the church. He called, equipped, commissioned and empowered his followers for this significant ministry. In addition to the biblical mandates there are other important resources that serve as building blocks to an effective and sustainable ministry of visitation by the laity.

In addition, selected models of visitation programs in churches, medical and community service agencies are examined. The primary model, evaluated through interviews and questionnaires, is the program at First Baptist Church, Dartmouth. Out of this evaluation flows observations and recommendations that have application to the ministry of lay visitation in other settings.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The process of putting together this project has had its moments of delightful humour (stories of shared visits), its times of terror (never being finished), and its days of forbidding but fruitful development, thanks to the encouragement of many. The pressing passion was to put on paper some of the lessons learned through years of visitation that peaked in the program at First Baptist Church, Dartmouth.

After serving for ten years as the senior pastor of the church there was talk of a sabbatical. The question was asked, "What would you enjoy?" Dr. Naomi Hersom, with the support of the deacons' board, encouraged this journey of doctoral study.

Gratitude goes to the leadership and congregation of First Baptist Church in Dartmouth who provided the time and the resources that made the venture possible. Also, they provided the setting, willingly participated in the study, and were the visitors and visited who made the project a reality.

Equally significant has been the co-operative staff at Acadia Divinity College. They have gently prodded at times, provided helpful direction, and throughout the journey been very supportive. Dr. Andrew Irvine, Rev. Glenn Wooden, and Dr. Tim McLay have all served at the helm of the Doctor of Ministry Program during my duration. Dr. Frank Guinta, with his perceptive questions, has provided profitable "on-site" field direction. Biblical and practical insights were shared by Dr. Allison Trites, Dr. Robert Wilson, Dr. Randolph Legassie and others.

Over the years many lay people and theological students have walked up a driveway with me and waited in anticipation as the door to a family home swung open. Hundreds of happy memories come flooding back recalling those moments of Christian ministry. What an incredible privilege! Like the proverbial snowflake, no two visits were ever the same. Thanks go to the legions who ventured out to visit in the name of Christ and his church.

God has blessed me with a marvelous family. Our children, Andrew and Suzanne, have helped to keep us in touch with the times - prompting their parents to stay young, to be "risk-takers", and to follow the Lord's leading. Florence Watt has been my "best friend", and "fun-to-be-with" partner in ministry for over thirty years. This special family has affably shared my time with church and community through many days and nights of visitation. For these many generous gifts, I will be eternally grateful.

I dedicate this project to my father and mother. John and Frances Watt, who pointed the way and modeled it for me. They encouraged their preacher son - in sports, in school, in marriage, and in ministry. They taught the value of work, the significance of family, the importance of friends, the need to serve others, and the supremacy of the Saviour. The journey reveals the truth of the Wisdom writer: "My son, keep your father's commands and do not forsake your mother's teaching" (Pr. 6:20).

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Chapter One

PROJECT INTRODUCED

A. PASSION IDENTIFIED

The growing challenge of pastoral care in today's complex society has caused the writer to look more closely at the effectiveness of visitation in the local church. A survey of Canadian Baptist churches has revealed that competent pastoral care enhances the strength of the local church and its ability to reach and enfold people. It is the writer's view that a more systematic approach to visitation would provide an impetus for growth that is needed in many congregations today.

Looking out the large picture window in the second story of the family home in Marysville, New Brunswick, the writer's father pointed to the cotton mill's row houses on Water Street across the Nashwaak River. "See those homes?" he questioned. "Rev. Smith went door to door and reached the men of those families with the gospel. If you are entering the ministry (a decision had just been made), remember the importance of visitation."

During a student year in Scotland, the writer became involved in the visitation program of a mission organization called Operation Mobilization. The dynamic witness of the gospel through door-to-door evangelism had a strong impact upon the idealism of a young pastor. The concept of visitation evangelism continued as a priority in the student years at Acadia Divinity College with the development of outreach teams during the school terms. The writer became involved during the summer with mission tours that trained young people to do evangelism through community visitation.

The passion for visitation continued to grow with clinical studies and the specialized training it provided in working with hurting people in prisons,

hospitals and other centres of care. A parish based visitation program was developed in Middleton Baptist Church with the cooperation of the clinical training department at Acadia. Students were given weekly visitation assignments and supervised by the writer and their peers. Interest in equipping students in the practice of ministry led the writer to pursue the development of Supervised Field Education at Acadia Divinity College. There has been for the writer, throughout the years of pastoral ministry, a continuing cycle of study, practice, and training others in the art of visitation.

Visitation has been a primary concern in the writer's practice of ministry for over thirty years. The pastoral care provided by the writer in the first rural pastorate was primarily a solo endeavour. On occasion, the wife of the writer or an interested deacon was invited to participate. The concept of team ministry, and sharing the pastoral responsibilities, came to the fore during a brief ministry term with a large staff in First Baptist Church, Calgary. Thereafter, in the churches, which the writer served, over thirty theological students in preparation for pastoral ministry were included in the ministry of visitation. In recent years there has been an intentional effort to include lay people, along with theological students, in the ministry of visitation.

There is a strong case today for the Christian church to review this whole subject of visitation. On the one hand, it appears that Western society has abandoned its spiritual roots. The American Catholic writer, William J. Baush, provides rationale for this reality:

Americans watch some 1550 hours of TV a year, and 59 million American Catholics live in a land where 92 million homes count 193 million TV sets and nearly 67 million VCRs. And the media's message (all that never-ending input) is incessantly the self, self-satisfaction, self-fulfillment, self-esteem, self-image, self-enjoyment, self-involvement - a message at odds with the

mystery of the cross.¹

However, there is another side to the story. The saying, "when the night is darkest the stars shine the brightest" may relate to the Christian church.

Several voices are noting that this is a day of incredible opportunity. Canadian writer and sociologist Reg Bibby comments:

For all their current problems, Canada's religious groups are well positioned to respond to the times. That probably is an understatement: the fact of the matter is that they are undoubtedly "best positioned" to speak to the spiritual and moral needs of the country. Individually and certainly collectively, religious groups possess the history, the institutional credibility, and the resources necessary to have a profound impact on Canadians and Canadian life.²

Bibby concludes this line of thought with these important words, "Churches and Canadians, however, need to be connected."³ At the heart of this project is the issue of connecting the resources of the local congregation to the spiritual needs of the community it serves. The health and vitality of the local church is related to its ability to care effectively for its membership and those who come seeking to have their spiritual needs met.

While some people do seek out the church to meet their spiritual, social, and personal needs, many only find those needs met when the church reaches out to them. Lyle E. Schaller reminds pastors of the effectiveness of moving out in ministry:

For generations the organizational self-image of a Protestant congregation in the United States was a gathered community with its own private meeting place and served by a pastor and perhaps other paid staff as well as volunteer leaders. Its ministry was pointed to with pride as an in-house affair. The assumption was that ministry depended on people "coming to our meeting place."⁴

¹ William J. Baush, The Parish of the Next Millennium (Mystic: Twenty-Third Publishers, 1997), 241.

² Reginald W. Bibby, There's Got To Be More (Winfield: Wood Lake Books Inc., 1995), 10.

³ Bibby, 10.

⁴ Lyle Schaller, Innovations in Ministry: Models for the 21st Century (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), 76.

The new model moves the congregation and its ministries away from the controlling centre and toward the collaborating perimeter. The new model is less protectionist and more dangerous. At the heart of this new model for ministry is the idea that the most productive strategy begins with going to the people, meeting them on their turf, and beginning with their agenda. That is not a new idea. The best model can be found in the New Testament in the ministries of Jesus, Paul and others.

Visitation has been a key element in the ministry of the church through the centuries. This study will take a look at how the subject became a part of the writer's priority in the pastoral leadership of First Baptist Church, Dartmouth. Both the difficulties and the values of visitation will be explored as the subject of the thesis is introduced.

Time has a tendency to change the meaning of words. The setting into which the writer began the practice of pastoral visitation over thirty years ago has changed with the culture. Work practices, increased mobility, changing life styles, economics, spiritual values, all influence the expectations of those who visit and are visited on behalf of the church.

Ronald K. Brown, in a brief article entitled, "A Definition of Personal Visitation", provides a valuable definition of the subject in these words: "[Christian visitation is] a direct encounter by an individual with another person for the purpose of understanding and addressing the person's needs, offering encouragement and assistance in the name of Jesus, and declaring through word and/or deed the abiding love and care of God."⁵

The Bible commends visitation to the church in the writing of James, "Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, to visit the

⁵ Ronald K. Brown, "A Definition of Personal Visitation", Harry M. Piland, Comp. Going...One on One (Nashville: Convention Press. 1994), 21.

fatherless and widows in their affliction..." (Jas. 1:27).⁶ Society yearns for visitation in the outcry for substantial relationships and a more meaningful faith in this generation. Joe R. Stacker speaks to this reality when he writes:

Leading futurists stress the need for "high touch" in the midst of our high-tech life-style. Simply stated, persons who live day-in-day-out with machines need people around them to enhance their own identity, self-concept, and worth before God. That's one reason personal visitation remains vital.⁷

The visitation that will be explored in this project has a definitive purpose. Visits made in the name of Christ are more than casual encounters. The visits are intentional. The visitor is there to connect with people and discover needs (spiritual, emotional, physical) that the love of God and faith in Christ can meet in the context of the Christian community.

The writer stepped into the office of a friend and neighbouring pastor who had also entered the ministry almost thirty years earlier.⁸ He appeared to be very fatigued. When questioned about his state of being he replied, "It's a much more difficult task [pastoral care] now than when we started." One writer, speaking about the complexity of the modern pastoral office said: "He must be an administrator, priest, preacher, pastor in the complex life of the community, able to perform the original and sacred duties of his calling in a setting which requires of him new strategies, new skills, and insights."⁹

The pastor is the key person in the development of a program of pastoral care in the local church. However, Alfred Bruce Cole has rightly noted that "pastoral visitation" includes more than the pastor:

⁶ The Authorized or King James Version passages of Scripture will be especially noted. The New International Version (NIV) is the Bible text used almost exclusively in this thesis.

⁷ Joe R. Stacker, "Personal Visitation and Church Growth", Harry M. Piland, Comp. Going...One on One (Nashville: Convention Press, 1994), 27.

⁸ Nelson Metcalfe A. Private Interview (Bedford, N.S., Bedford Baptist Church), 1996.

⁹ Richard Niebuhr and Daniel G. Williams, eds. The Ministry In Historical Perspective (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1956), 11.

Pastoral visitation refers to specific visits made to an individual whose need is known and addressed in acceptance, love, and concern. Pastoral visitation does not refer to the ministry of the pastor himself, but to all persons who assist in giving guidance, assistance, care, or help to individuals where needs arise.¹⁰

The writer's research has shown that many of today's churches struggle to respond to the opportunity for pastoral care and reaching new people through visitation. As Canadian sociologist Reginald W. Bibby has remarked, "The churches are floundering at a time when they should be flourishing."¹¹ The challenge before the church of today is to discover how visitation can become a vital part of its ministry plan. The thesis will look at some of the challenges faced by the church in its attempt to respond to the need for pastoral care and the development of an effective visitation program. This means visitation that reaches beyond responding to crisis.

B. PROBLEM EXPLORED

i. Attitude

Before beginning to focus on the specific need of a more effective visitation program at First Baptist Church in Dartmouth, this chapter will examine some of the obstacles that hinder this ministry. The writer observed that a number of the leaders interviewed for this project expressed uneasiness with their involvement in the ministry of visitation. Others expressed their views of about aspects of this ministry that make it a difficult task for many. Some stated personal shyness, lack of discipline, inadequate training and other ministry priorities, as barriers to a more satisfying involvement in the ministry of visitation. Unmet expectations of congregations, alongside a negative attitude towards visitation by pastoral leaders, can have a significant affect on

¹⁰ Alfred Bruce Cole, Establishing A Balanced Program of Pastoral Visitation At the Highlight Heights Baptist Church, D.Min. Thesis (Louisville: Southern Baptist Seminary, 1979), 3.

¹¹ Bibby, 8.

the health of the church. It is important for church leaders to understand their responsibility in this area of ministry.

A professor of practical theology reported to the writer that several of his students in seminary gave the ministry of visitation a low priority. Other tasks demanded more of their time and attention. When challenged, their explanation was that times have changed and the importance of being a visiting pastor had diminished. They believe that people have full schedules and would not welcome a visit. One student's answer to visitation was to set up office hours at the church and have people come for counseling.

However, the professor believes that even in these changing times, the value of pastoral visitation has not lessened. While the task may be more difficult today, it still is of great importance in helping the pastor to know the needs of people. Visitation continues to be a primary expectation of pastoral leadership in the rural culture of Atlantic Canada.¹² While there are changing attitudes in urban centres requiring creativity and fresh ideas, the task of visitation continues to be a significant part of the pastoral office of any congregation.

Attitude plays a significant role in the success of any endeavour. There are a variety of visits that the pastor or pastoral visitor may be called to make. It may be a crisis visit to a family in need. One may be called to a home to explain the meaning of salvation, which leads to conversion. Again, the pastoral visitor may need to confront someone who is causing trouble within the fellowship. A visit may be made to a family who is interested in connecting with a ministry in the church.

It is the casual visit to a member of the congregation that seems to bring protests from some clergy. The well-known preacher John Henry Jowett once

¹² Harry Gardner et. al. The Rural Church Study, 1989-1993 (United Baptist Convention of the Atlantic Provinces, 1993), 53, 85.

said, "Visitation is a tragic waste of a strong man's time."¹³ This negative attitude towards visitation tends to be more prevalent in the urban context where the expectations have changed in how to conduct pastoral care. Urban culture, which influences the church, puts a lower priority on spending time with people. Marshall Shelley challenges this trend in the call to ministry:

Many of us envision ourselves a Moses, pointing to the Promised Land. But we're surprised how much time we spend wandering the desert (like Moses after all!) ... That, [amidst the meandering of God's people], however, is where many of us are called. Being with people in the wilderness is the only way they'll know the love of Jesus. And not until they know that love will they gain the faith to enter his Promised Land.¹⁴

Often, in the casual visit to a congregational member, opportunities of ministry open up to the pastor. The familiar and the ordinary becomes transformed by a caring pastor or church visitor listening to a parishioner who is trying in a very real way to make sense out of life. The New Testament records the stories of Jesus making visits to a home to celebrate a wedding (Jn. 2: 1-11), to spend time with friends (Lk.10: 38-42) or to share a meal (Mt. 9:10-13) where unique opportunities for ministry were presented. Luke particularly highlights Jesus' presence at meals as teaching opportunities. This has also been the experience of the writer and laity who have shared together in the ministry of visitation at First Baptist Church, Dartmouth. Home visits, which are thought to be "ordinary", suddenly were transformed by the presence of the Holy Spirit into times of spiritual discovery and spiritual dynamic. The visitor became the channel of God's grace working in the hearts of those being visited. One student, who questioned the value of "tea and crumpet" visits, discovered how Christ could bring healing and hope to a parishioner passing

¹³ J.L. Gilmore, "Making Visitation Work", *Christianity Today*, 18.4 (1973), 28.

¹⁴ Marshall Shelley, ed., "Heart & Soul", *Leadership*, 19.1 (1998), 130.

through a period of personal pain. What began that afternoon as an “ordinary” home visit, became for the visitors and the visited a special moment of redemption and new life.

Throughout this thesis, the building of an effective program of visitation will be related to the pastoral leadership's willingness to share the ministry and to equip others to serve. While some pastors struggle to visit, there are many more who fail to prepare their people to serve in this significant ministry of the church.

There is a cartoon that pictures a group of lay leaders speaking to their startled pastor. The caption under the picture reads, "You've taught us so well that we don't need you any more." The fear of losing one's job because of competent training of the laity is quite unrealistic. When the laity is adequately trained to provide pastoral care of the congregation, the pastor is freed to provide more leadership in the church.

The ministry of pastoral care requires a passion on the part of the participant. Training others demands a confidence in one's ability and a trust in the capability of the laity. A sense of God's call will provide the motivation to start, the courage to work in difficult places, and the patience to stay in for the long term. A fresh awareness of the spiritual resources provided by Christ encourages his workers and moves the ministry forward to fruitfulness (2 Cor. 9:8, Phil. 4:13, 1 Tim. 1:12). Lyle Johnson embodies this passion for visitation in his work and words:

Relational contacts are powerful. Something special takes place when you enter a home. You come into a person's world in a deeper way...[visiting] is not my job as much as my desire. I do it as and when I can. I don't do it near as much as I enjoy because of other responsibilities.¹⁵

¹⁵ Doug Koop, "The Positive Power of Pastoral Visiting", Christian Week, 12.2 (1999), 8.

As noted by Lyle Johnson, even the most committed pastoral care worker finds that the pressure of time limits their involvement. We will look at this subject in greater depth.

ii. Time

Time is a pressure point in the ministry of most pastors as they face the tyranny of the urgent on a daily basis. For most church leaders, the question of setting priorities is always a personal struggle. *Leadership* editors Terry Muck and Paul Robbins interviewed time management consultant Ted Engstrom on this issue. They put the question in this context:

Imagine yourself in a small office facing an overwhelming task. All you have is yourself, some books, and old beat-up desk, a part-time secretary, and a telephone that rings off the wall. What would you bring to this situation from all you've learned about time management?¹⁶

Engstrom responds to the question of handling time: "When you talk about management of time, you're really talking about managing yourself."¹⁷ Engstrom was reminding the pastor in the place of ministry that time ultimately is an internal issue. It relates to personal expectations, setting priorities and communicating one's concerns to the appropriate people.

Several pastors who were interviewed by the writer expressed their concern about lack of time to complete the ministry of visitation. Some pastors reported that they focus on crisis visits within the congregation and leave the rest of the task to the deacons and other laity within the congregation. When Joseph Parker accepted the call to be pastor in London he wrote the following acceptance letter: "As a pastor, I cannot visit for the sake of visiting. At all times I am glad to obey the calls of the sick and the dying or to guide truth

¹⁶ Terry Muck and Paul Robbins, eds., "Time For Things That Matter", *Leadership*, 3.2 (1982), 18.

¹⁷ Muck and Robbins, 18.

seekers, but continuous rounds of so-called pastoral visitation, I do not believe [in], and [as] such, cannot promise [it]."¹⁸ Parker was putting forward in this statement a plan of visitation ministry that he felt was realistic and fruitful in the light of his other responsibilities with a large urban congregation.

A young pastor with two small children accepted the position of senior minister in a large church and made a decision from the beginning that he needed to care for the church in a way that would not harm his family. He vowed to make as few evening visits as possible and yet at the same time find other ways to communicate his caring. He shares the results of his decision: "To my surprise, that particular boundary enhanced the respect the congregation showed me. Most of my visitation is done on my lunchtime. I visit men, and sometimes couples, for lunch. They appreciate the protection of their home time, too."¹⁹ The challenge of protecting themselves and their family, fulfilling the other important demands of ministry, and the need to provide effective pastoral care present the pastor with creative tension to tackle and conquer. The example above demonstrates how that can be accomplished by developing a visitation program that fits the particular needs of the pastor and those of the congregation.

Tied in with the question of time is this struggle with the issue of expectations. The media bring to the average person in the pew a model of the super church and the star preacher. This portrayal of church and pastoral leadership may cause some to wallow in comparative discontent. Unreal expectations may be the order-of-the-day when one adds the consumer mentality and lack of church loyalty in today's culture. As has been mentioned already, the pressure on the pastor may be internal as well as external. The bar of expectations may be placed at an impossible level by the pastor as well as

¹⁸ Gilmore, 55.

¹⁹ Scott Reavely, "Pastor, Do You Love Us?". *Leadership*, 20.1 (1999), 65.

the people in the pew.

George Barna reminds pastors that the question of unrealistic expectations is a factor in the struggle of many ministers and churches today:

Many pastors are doomed from the day they join a congregation because the congregation's expectations are unachievable by any human being. No matter how skilled, how loving, how intelligent or how experienced the pastor might be, the people of the church expect too much too quickly for the pastor to have much chance of succeeding in their eyes.²⁰

Another issue to consider is the changing social factors that apply to the question of time and timing. Longer working hours and the necessity of both parents being in the workplace diminishes the availability of laity for visitation. This may be reflected in the pastor's time schedule as well, with the wife working full time in her own profession. More people work out of their homes. The need to plan a pastoral visit that does not interrupt their daily schedule is an important consideration.

First Baptist Church is a congregation that has been located in the centre of the city of Dartmouth for over one hundred and fifty years. The city has a population of approximately seventy thousand in a metro area of over three hundred thousand. The arena of service (regional), the nature of its ministry (cross-cultural), and the size of its membership (600 people) have demanded a careful review of the church's effectiveness in caring for the breadth of its ministry within the church family and in the wider community it serves (1500 people). Many in the community have connected with the church through pastoral care (weddings, crises, funerals, sickness), through a variety of children's programs and youth events, and through the inner city social programs that minister to hundreds of adults and children, including street people, who live in the neighbourhood of the church.

²⁰ George Barna, Today's Pastors (Ventura: Regal Books, 1993), 154.

The writer quickly identified with the words of Alfred Bruce Cole when he wrote about his experience of the ministry of visitation in his local congregation. He said:

The nature of the pastor's role demands his ministry to be one of caring and shepherding his people. The accomplishment of this role is often through a program of visitation. There is inevitable frustration and the accompanying sense of guilt when the needs of the church go unmet.²¹

Pastoral leadership in a church of this size included a variety of tasks. There were weekly sermons to prepare; administrative problems to solve; crisis counseling to be met; staff direction to give; worship services to plan; and programs of outreach to support. The church leadership served in the church, community, and had wider circles of continuing responsibility within the denomination and parachurch organizations. There were many details to attend to and daily interruptions to embrace. However, the one area that brought the most frustration and guilt to the writer was the unfinished task of pastoral care. The pastoral staff welcomed the possibility of bringing on a person who could help the rest of the personnel respond to the ocean of "yet-to-be-completed" ministry opportunities. The rationale for the proposed position of "coordinator of ministries" addressed a part of the perceived problem:

It is anticipated that the church will continue to grow and see many new faces. For the pastoral staff to keep track of everyone and all their needs has become an increasingly difficult task. This has been especially critical for new people coming into the church. At present, information about people who have identified with the church in some way, is simply recorded on scraps of paper or stored in the pastors' heads. This makes consistent follow-up difficult. Knowledge of talents, gifts, abilities, involvement, and interests and needs is spread among the staff.²²

²¹ Cole, 3.

²² First Baptist Church, Dartmouth, Preliminary Report on an Administrative Position for the Church, 1991, 1.

Prayer, planning, people, and programming were all a part of the process of meeting the challenge of a growing church with parishioners in need of pastoral care and discipling. Over the years several attempts had been made to establish a more effective program of visitation. The struggle has been to design a program that was both effective and sustainable. There has been some measure of progress over time and better pastoral care has been the result. However, the church has a considerable way to go in making the program of visitation both sufficient and sustainable.

III. VALUES OF VISITATION

It is helpful to review some of the general values of visitation before focusing in on the specific plan of pastoral care, training and outreach at First Baptist Church. A telephone survey across Canada with church leaders and the response of questions to former student associates brought to light both the values and obstacles of visitation today. Books and articles on the subject of visitation reinforce these points.

a. Personal Concern

Years of visitation have proved to the writer that this aspect of ministry demonstrates to people that the church really cares about them. Churches, like charitable organizations, if they are not careful, can lose the common touch if their focus is on the program rather than the people they seek to help. Paul, writing to the early church in Rome, reminds them of the significance of the manner in which they exercise their spiritual gifts. He writes, "... if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully" (Rom.12:8).

John Maxwell in his book, *Be A People Person*, shares an anonymous

note that he received one day from a member of his congregation that demonstrates the value of personal contact. It said:

When special people touch our lives then suddenly we see how beautiful and wonderful our world can really be. They show us that our special hopes and dreams can take us far by helping us look inward and believe in who we are. They bless us with their love and joy through everything they give. When special people touch our lives they teach us how to live.²³

Christian faith centres on an incarnate Christ who came into the crisis of a disturbed world (Jn. 1:14). Geoffrey W. Bromiley in his *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, notes the significance of the meaning of "visit" that flows through the Scriptures. Visitation speaks clearly of a God who longs to know his people (Gen. 3:8-9), and of a God who deeply cares about his people (Jer. 23:2-4). Jesus made visitation a valid and valued part of the kingdom work and the vibrant mission of his chosen followers (Mt. 25:34-40).²⁴ Keeping in touch with people in need has been at the core of the church's ministry throughout history. Time has brought about many changes in society but the longing to know and be known has not changed.

A social worker in conversation with the writer said, "Government cutbacks make the need for contact with the marginalized of society more important than ever." The focus on a ministry of caring that is at the heart of First Baptist Church, Dartmouth, calls for a style that is "high touch". The multitude of ministry programs to the marginalized requires multiple staff and large numbers of laity who are willing to become personally involved with people if the work is to be accomplished.

The pervasive mood of individualism and privacy in western society sometimes discourages concerted attempts to contact people directly. Yet

²³ John C. Maxwell, *Be A People Person* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1989), 9.

²⁴ Geoffrey W. Bromiley, ed. *Theological Dictionary of The New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 244-247.

studies show the value of visitation in the growth of churches that engage in this crucial ministry. It was Thomas Goodman who wrote, "We can be tempted to conclude that 'Face-to-face' visitation is a thing of the past. A card or phone call will do. Evidence still indicates a connection between growing churches and in-home visitation."²⁵

b. Personal Knowledge

The Sunday school teacher, youth worker, and pastor gain firsthand knowledge of the people they serve during a home visit. Visitation allows the preacher to know his parishioners' personal and spiritual needs more specifically. Weekly preaching can be more relevant and helpful to the congregation. Meeting the parents of a Sunday school student in the home can help the teacher know the spiritual support or lack of it that may affect the growth of the child. A home visit may aid the youth worker to become aware of a developing problem in the life of a teenager. Becoming cognizant of major losses in a family (e.g., divorce, loss of job, death, etc.) through a home visit will enable the church leader to provide a more effective ministry to the member.

Reaching out to people who have recently come to the church can build the bridge to a continuing relationship. Information about the worship, work, and witness of the church may be shared and a rewarding friendship can be started. The visitor can discover the spiritual needs of the individual or family and where those needs might be met in the ministry of the church. Discovery of spiritual gifts and passion for service can also be determined.

²⁵ Thomas Goodman, "Sunday School Follies & Fallacies," Sunday School Leadership, Issue 11 (1991), 29.

c. Personal Affirmation

Home visits provide an awareness of special events in the lives of the congregation. The visitor may discover that a parent has received a job promotion, a student has passed a major exam, and a son or daughter has won an athletic award. These are special moments of affirmation and celebration.

A visit made to a family in a time of crisis can provide the struggling party with a message of affirmation. Many people feel alone in the midst of the disappointments and losses of life. The need for a caring friend is particularly crucial at these times. Arthur D. Burcham writes:

A personal visit to these lonely persons restores their faith in people and restores their sense of self-worth. The personal visit makes a dramatic statement: "I care for you. That's why I am here. You are worth my time and effort. In the name of Jesus, I love you for who you are and for what you can become."²⁶

A family providing effective ministry through music, teaching or some other service in the life of the congregation, can be affirmed through visitation to the home. Appreciation for a task well done builds the team spirit and motivates people toward excellence. These visits can help to provide important information on other ministries in the church and the significant part this family plays in the larger picture of the Kingdom work.

d. Pastoral Vision Shared

One of the greatest values of visiting along with the deacons and members of the congregation is that they gain a new understanding of pastoral ministry. Leaving a home after the second of three visits, the deacon said to the writer, "We [laity] are just not conscious of the amount of pain people carry in their lives." The drive to the third call was a quiet moment of insight and

²⁶ Arthur D. Burcham, "Some Reasons for Personal Visitation". Harry M. Piland, Comp. Going...One on One (Nashville: Convention Press, 1994), 32.

bonding in the vision and practice of pastoral ministry.

The visitor learns from the people visited more about the church and its ministry. This may come in the form of questions that need an answer. It may come in the form of a complaint that raises issues that need to be addressed or a compliment that reinforces the visitor's understanding of the value of the church in the lives of many people.

The pastor discovers the ability of the laity to provide pastoral care to others in the shared visit. The writer has been amazed at times how the laity connect so quickly to the people being visited. An afternoon of visiting along with a deacon can be more interesting, move more quickly, and be less demanding than calling upon people alone. The work and witness of the gospel has been a shared experience (Lk.10:1).

C. PLAN EXPLAINED

Having identified some reasons for the writer's passion for visitation, the problems faced in fulfilling the task and the values received from serving, the writer now moves into a plan of action for the pastoral care and outreach ministry of First Baptist Church in Dartmouth.

First Baptist Dartmouth has made several attempts over the years to establish a more effective program of visitation. The struggle has been to design an effective program that could be sustained. A careful study verifies that there has been measurable progress over time. Improved pastoral care and impressive outreach has been the result. However, the church has a distance to travel in making the program of visitation both sufficient to meet the needs of people under its care, satisfactory in reaching the potential at its door, and sustainable over time. The following are some of the areas that need further development:

- (1) Participation of the staff and spiritual leadership of the church in establishing and supporting a vision for the ministry of visitation;
- (2) Communication of the importance of home and institutional visitation as a strategic ministry of the church;
- (3) Continuing the expansion of good record keeping and accountability of the visits being made so that the priorities of subsequent ministry can be determined;
- (4) Commissioning of a specific person, staff or laity, to provide the ministry with clear and consistent leadership;
- (5) Provision of a well-defined infrastructure for the continuity of the ministry;
- (6) Congregational education in the value of lay participation in a ministry that was once primarily the work of the ordained clergy;
- (7) Recognition of people who are gifted in care-giving and a system of recruiting and equipping them for this important front-line ministry; and
- (8) Provision for a continuing evaluation process to monitor the effectiveness of the visitation program and to make the required adjustments.

Visitation became a priority in the ministry plan of First Baptist Church. The writer attempted to keep as many evenings as possible available for visitation. The associate staff was encouraged to make visitation a priority in their weekly schedule of ministry. The laity were invited to participate in a variety of ways in the pastoral care of the congregation. Deacons and other interested members were welcomed by the staff to accompany them on visits to seniors and shut-ins and to share in the outreach to new contacts. The emphasis in preaching on Sunday and the practice throughout the week pointed to the priority of visitation in the church's ministry.

Kennon Callahan, in his book, *Twelve Keys To An Effective Church*, places visitation as the second significant "key" to building an effective church.

He suggests, for instance, that preachers put in one hour of visitation during the week for every minute they preach on Sunday:

That is, it will be helpful toward the development of an effective and successful church for the pastor who preaches twenty minutes on Sunday morning to share approximately twenty hours per week in visitation with members, constituents, newcomers, unchurched, and hospitalized and homebound persons. This rule of thumb invites pastors to think through those strategic priorities that will best advance a church toward becoming increasingly effective and successful.²⁷

Reflecting on the struggle that pastors and churches have to accomplish the task of visitation, the quotation from Callahan holds up the ideal. There are many things in the ministry of the church today that thwart the process of building an effective program of visitation. However, the point of making visitation a vital and consistent priority is worth pursuing. The following chapters will explore some of the plans one church put in place to provide an effective program of visitation. The thesis will examine questions that arise and seek theological and practical solutions that can move the church forward.

Key to the development of a sustainable visitation program in the local church is the empowerment of the laity. The assessment of the visitation program at First Baptist Church, Dartmouth verifies this reality. The writer and staff initiated the program in order to meet the rising demands of pastoral care in a growing congregation. The program attempted to recruit members of the congregation and then to motivate, equip, and empower them to serve as lay visitors. At the same time a better system of acquiring and maintaining the church's membership and adherent lists was developed. This evaluative study of the present visitation program is being undertaken with the desire to provide some helpful resources to enrich the shepherding and outreach ministry of the

²⁷ Kennon L. Callahan, Twelve Keys to an Effective Church (Toronto: Harper & Row, 1983), 12.

church.

The remaining chapters of the thesis/project will explore such areas as the biblical/theological basis for building a ministry of visitation. Models of visitation in religious/church groups as well as those in the community services and the medical field will be examined. Then the program that has been developed at First Baptist Church in Dartmouth will be outlined in detail. The visitation program's strengths and weaknesses will then be assessed, based on the study of the surveys by those who visited and were visited in the program at First Baptist. The writer will attempt to identify some teaching resources that can assist First Baptist to build a better program of visitation.

It is the desire of the writer that this research will have value to a wider circle of churches and Christian leaders. An attempt will be made to point out some practical findings of the research that might be applied to the visitation programs in churches of various sizes and cultural settings.

In summary, this thesis/project has the purpose of contributing to the development of a more effective and sustainable visitation ministry at First Baptist Church, Dartmouth. The continuation of the ministry over time is at the centre of the writer's concern and the thesis will address the issue. In writing the design of the visitation ministry at Westhill Park Baptist Church, Regina, the pastor begins with this evaluation: "Most pastors and churches would say that they visit but few have a visitation program that consistently produces Kingdom results over a long period of time."²⁸ It is the belief of this writer that an effective and enduring visitation program glorifies God by building a healthier and more dynamic church. The study explores the strengths and weaknesses of past and present ministries with the view of building upon the foundations that have been laid. There has been an attempt to look at the theory

²⁸James Wells, Building a Visitation Program that Works (Calgary: Evangelism Committee Baptist Union of Western Canada, 1991), 1.

of the subject and its practical application. The ministry of visitation has an individual as well as a corporate or community dimension. Therefore, the biblical and theological foundations of visitation that apply both to the servant of Christ and the church of Christ have been the subject of this investigation.

Personal and telephone interviews were used to explore models of visitation ministry found in Baptist churches across Canada. Time limited the research to churches within our denominational structure. Convention leadership provided names of pastors and churches that had the reputation of excellence in the ministry of pastoral care and visitation. Helpful information was acquired from the examination of a number of medical and social service models of visitation. Community based service organizations willingly shared their training manuals and offered their time in personal visits and telephone interviews.

Twenty people involved in the ministry of visitation at First Baptist Church, Dartmouth, were invited to participate in the research process. They contributed to the research through personal and group interviews, and by providing a response to a questionnaire. The writer was aware of the participation level of the visitors and their ability to articulate their active interest. The larger group of those who were "the visited" was chosen on a more random basis. As will be discussed in the evaluation, it was on the understanding that they had been recently visited by a member of the visitation program that they were chosen to participate. A cross section of the congregation was picked to represent different age groups and levels of church participation. The thesis research also questioned present and former ministry students about their participation in the visitation ministry at First Baptist, Dartmouth. Twenty-eight of the thirty-three students who had served with the writer responded to the questionnaire. The research included the review of

seminars, training manuals, books, D.Min. thesis, church programs and videotapes on the subject of visitation.

The search for resources on the subject of visitation proved to be difficult. A number of the people interviewed expressed a desire to have a copy of the findings from this research. One of the best resources for visitation surfaced at a training seminar in Halifax under the leadership of Dr. Donald Peel. His small book, *The Ministry of Listening: Team Visitation in Home and Hospital*, has become a handbook for many churches who are training their laity in the ministry of visitation.

Telephone interviews with pastor and people of the Bridgewater United Baptist Church revealed a rich training manual for a ministry of pastoral care by Dennis L. Butcher. This equipping tool was developed in the Canadian church context and is designed for comfortable application in our ministry setting. The students and leaders in Bridgewater were excited about the program entitled: *Developing the Caring Community, A Ten-Week-Course in Pastoral Care for the Laity*. The Atlantic United Baptist Convention produced a third resource that the writer has used in the training of visitors at First Baptist Church, Dartmouth. This carefully produced booklet by the Christian Training Commission is called, *The Joy of Caring, Developing Christian Care-Giving Skills*. It became a proficient tool in the development of pastoral care skills within the congregation. Other resources are highlighted in the final chapter on evaluation and in Appendix B.²⁹

This thesis is really about being personally and corporately prepared to serve Christ effectively in a given community of need. Marshall Shelley, speaks to this subject against the backdrop of a tragedy that struck Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado. The editor of *Leadership* tells the story of

²⁹ See pp. 155, 188-189.

pastors from the community who had been meeting for three years to pray for the people, the schools, the churches, and the civic leaders. When disaster struck they were ready to represent God in a powerful way. He writes about the importance of being prepared:

Fitness to minister can't be manufactured on the spot. Fitness is something you've gotta have *before* you need it. A crisis reveals your level of fitness; it's too late to try to get fit. Becoming fit to minister is done ahead of time.³⁰

By exploring the past, examining the present, and planning for the future, it is the desire of the writer that First Baptist Church in Dartmouth will be well prepared through its visitation program, to be a powerful witness for God in Dartmouth and in the wider constituency it serves.

³⁰Marshall Shelley, ed., "From the Editor", *Leadership*, 20.3 (1999), 3.

Chapter Two

PROJECT IN PERSPECTIVE

This chapter surveys the biblical and theological basis for the development of a ministry of visitation in the local church. Biblical history traces the subject of visitation from the creation story at the beginning of the Old Testament (Gen. 3:8ff.) through to the closing lines of Revelation in the New Testament, where the returning Christ is extended hospitality with the words, "Amen. Come, Lord Jesus" (Rev. 22:20b).

A biblical definition of "visit" and the biblical commission of Christ to "go and make disciples..." (Mt. 28:19-20) will be addressed in this chapter. The theological foundation stones of visitation will be recognized in this study as a base on which to build a solid sustainable program of pastoral care and outreach to the community by the local church.

A. VISITATION - A BIBLICAL SURVEY

Maple Leaf Gardens in Toronto was electrified with the sensational declaration by a black preacher from the United States, William A. Jones, "Ours is a visited planet"³¹ (author's emphasis). The occasion was one of the evening sessions of the Baptist World Alliance meetings in 1980. The message centered around the miraculous mystery of God "becoming flesh" and entering this world (Jn. 1:14). God is a visitor! It is his nature, and it was his mission.

i. God's Visitation - an Overview

The compassion and concern of God lie at the centre of the word "visit" in Scripture.³² God cares for his people wherever they are and visits them to

³¹ Robert A. Denny, ed., Celebrating Christ's Presence Through The Spirit: Official Report of the 14th Congress of The Baptist World Alliance (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1981), 38-43.

³² W.E. Vine, Dictionary of New Testament Words (London: Oliphants, 1967), 190, for a detailed discussion of the Greek verb episkeptomai.

bless them (Ps. 8:4-9; Lk. 1:68). Tragically, sometimes these divine visits result in punishment when the people become stubborn and disobedient (Ps. 89:32; Isa. 10:3; Jer. 10:15; 46:21; Hos. 9:7; Mic. 7:4). The biblical picture is one of an active God reaching out to a lost and lonely people and calling them back into relationship with himself and into a redemptive community.

The story of Holy Scripture is one of God encountering his people, beginning in Genesis with the visit of the Creator to the created. "Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the Lord God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the Lord God among the trees of the garden" (Gen. 3:8). In this passage many things are brought to light, including man's desire to hide from God. However, another emphasis in the passage is the desire of God to be in close communion with his creation.

The biblical story notes that God visited his people on many occasions. Abraham experienced the visitation of God as he was being prepared to lead the nation (Gen. 17). A.M. Hunter points to some of the crisis times of biblical history when God visited and rescued his people.³³ In particular, he highlights the Exodus, the Exile and the New Exodus accomplished in Christ. These were three cardinal times in holy history when God "visited" his people in a special way. Moses was approached in the desert through a burning bush and called to lead his people out of Egypt (Ex. 3:2). The Israelites found hope as God came and set his people free from the terrible bondage of the Egyptian masters and put them on the road to the promised land (Ex. 12:31-32). God visited Moses again on Mount Sinai and gave him the tablets of the law (Ex. 19-23; 25-31). God was forever seeking to guide and bless His people. He wanted the best for them.

It was a disobedient people, out of step with God and his purpose for

³³ A.M. Hunter, Jesus-Lord and Saviour (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 6.

their nation, that ended in a place of captivity once again (2 Kgs. 25:1ff.). However, God visited and rescued his people again through the decree of Cyrus, king of Persia (Ezra 1:1 ff.). The voice of the prophets kept calling the people back to God and toward a future day when God would visit and bring reconciliation.

The biblical account records God's concern for his people, coming again and again to speak to his disobedient and wayward servants. It was Elkanah's son Samuel who was visited by the Lord in the darkness of the night and called to be a prophet among his people (1 Sam. 3: 1-10). God visited the prophet Isaiah and gave him insight into the coming of the Christ (Isa. 9: 6-7; 11: 1-9). The salvation story that unfolds throughout the Old Testament speaks of God visiting his people and calling them to a life of justice, humility, and love (Mic. 6:8).

To summarize, the Old Testament reveals a God who visited his people and changed their lives, and through them the lives of others (e.g., Abraham, Gen. 17:1ff.; Moses, Ex. 3:1ff.; Joshua, Jos. 3:7ff.; Gideon, Jdg. 6:7ff.) These Old Testament accounts of divine visitation prepare the reader for the story of God's ultimate act of visitation. "But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son..." (Gal. 4:4a). Christ came to set people free from the bondage of sin and to place their feet on the way of eternal life (Jn. 3:16; 5:24; 8:34-36). In Christ, God visited humanity to fulfill his promise of redemption and to inaugurate the New Covenant (Gal. 3:13-14). The biblical concept of visitation is centred on the compassion of God being revealed in the Christ who came to heal the broken, release the captives, restore the blind and proclaim Good News to the poor (Lk. 4:18-19).

Jesus took up the concern for visiting those in need and deepens its

meaning by moving beyond the act to the attitude.³⁴ He applied it to people of all nations (Mk. 13:10) and circumstances of life (Mt. 25:31-46). Jesus related visitation to those in need as doing a favour to him and ultimately to God. It was a deeply spiritual act to visit and minister to those in need (Jas. 1:27). The importance of visitation became even clearer in the Gospel of John and Luke-Acts.

ii. God's Visitation in the Gospel of John

The ultimate visitation took place in the incarnation of God in Jesus Christ. In his gospel account, John records the amazing story of the Saviour's visit in these words, "The Word became flesh and lived for a while among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth." (Jn. 1:14).

Ray C. Stedman, in the commentary *God's Loving Word*,³⁵ points to some of the powerful images in this passage. First, it is discovered that Jesus came to spend time with humanity. The word "lived" literally means "tabernacled". He came and "pitched his tent among us" so folk could experience him up close. John brings alongside one another the two contrasting words-"Word" (logos) and "flesh" (sarx). "The Word, the creative thought and energy of the universe, became one of the most fragile of all His creations: a human baby."³⁶ God from the beginning wanted to blend the divine and the human. Mankind is marked with the "image of the Divine".³⁷ He dwells among humankind and within his people by the Holy Spirit.

John uses the image of the son reflecting the traits of the father. The

³⁴ Bromiley, 245.

³⁵ Ray C. Stedman, *God's Loving Word. Exploring the Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Discovery House Publishers, 1993), 36-39.

³⁶ Stedman, 37.

³⁷ Col. 3:10; 2 Cor. 3:18; Phil. 3:21; 1 Jn. 3:2.

phrase "the glory of the one and only Son" implies that one can know God's glorious character by looking at the lifestyle of the Son.³⁸ The glory that shone in Jesus, that was recognized by some of the people with whom he came in contact, was the same glory that characterized God the Father: grace and truth.³⁹

Again, the visit of the Christ child on that first Christmas was God's most amazing act of caring for a fallen creation. Thomas C. Oden speaks of the Incarnation in these words:

The incarnation was viewed as the overarching pattern of the willingness of God to enter fully into our human situation of alienation and suffering. God's self-giving incarnate love calls for energetic human response, for entering the situation of suffering of the neighbour to redeem, show mercy, heal and transform, so as to manifest Christ's love amid the world.⁴⁰

The sending of the Son, Jesus Christ into the world by God the Father, is a constant theme in the Gospel of John.⁴¹ Beginning with the incarnation (Jn.1:14) it is referred to in over thirty other places. In the story of the healing of the blind man the gospel writer notes that Jesus has been sent for a purpose. "As long as it is day, we must do the work of him of him who sent me" (Jn. 9:4a). This verse speaks of the exclusiveness of the "sent one."⁴² However, the text takes a post-resurrection perspective and looks forward to the day when the disciples will be "sent" to continue the work that Jesus began. Jesus urges them to get on with the work while the door of opportunity is still open (Jn. 9:4b).

John notes how Jesus encourages his followers in the work they will do and the witness they will bring. The promise Christ makes is that the disciples

³⁸ Col. 2:9; 2 Cor. 4:6.

³⁹ Stedman, 38.

⁴⁰ Thomas C. Oden, Classical Pastoral Care 3 Vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1987), III: 12.

⁴¹ George R. Beasley-Murray, John (Dallas: Word, 1987), 379.

⁴² D. A. Carson, The Gospel According To John (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 362.

will be sent out to do even greater things (Jn.14:12). The reason for that is because Jesus will be crucified, resurrected, ascended and glorified. The disciples' authority and power to do mighty acts rests in God in the same way as Jesus is dependent on the Father who has the power to raise the dead (Jn. 5:20-21). Before the death, resurrection and ascension, the ministry of the Christ was somewhat veiled.⁴³ Even those closest to him did not understand the meaning of what he said or was planning to do (Jn. 14:5). The disciples were not excluded from important ministry before the cross (Jn. 4:34-38). However, it was in the wake of his glorification that his followers came to understand and to communicate the meaning of the "signs" and "works" that Jesus performed. The disciples were empowered by the Holy Spirit and commissioned with the authority of Christ to engage in a far-reaching ministry that would continue what Christ had begun and to bring glory to the Father (Jn. 15:26,27; 17:20; 20:21, 29).⁴⁴

Again, the purpose for which Jesus was sent into the world is clearly presented by John's Gospel. He came as the Father's gift so that those who believe in him might not perish but have eternal life (Jn. 3:16), experiencing new life as the children of God (Jn.1:12-13) and freedom from slavery to sin because they have been set free by the Son of God (Jn. 8:34-36). This life-changing purpose becomes the experience and the witness of the disciples of Jesus. The apostles are commissioned at the conclusion of several of the Gospels and at the beginning of Acts to carry forth the mission of communicating the "Good News."⁴⁵ Jesus was motivated by the urgency of the divine imperative and this same mandate was given by him to his followers (Jn. 9:4).

⁴³ Carson, 496.

⁴⁴ Beasley-Murray, 380.

⁴⁵ Mt. 28:19-20; Lk. 24:45-49; Jn. 20:21; Acts 1:8.

Christ's post-resurrection commission to the faithful workers noted the theme of "agency." His directive was "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you" (Jn. 20:21). They would fulfill their mission in the same way and under the same authority as the Christ. In a sense, through their efforts "Jesus is in an ongoing state of 'sentness'."⁴⁶ The disciples are "sent" to continue the ministry of Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit (Jn. 20:21-23).

iii. God's Visitation in Luke-Acts

Throughout the Gospel of Luke one reads the accounts of Christ's incarnational ministry and the emphasis on "agency", the principle in which one person acts on behalf of another. Luke, in Zechariah's Benedictus, describes God's coming in Jesus as the divine "visitation" with the purpose of blessing and redeeming his people (Lk.1:68).⁴⁷ This prophecy is affirmed in the minds of people who witnessed the mighty acts that Jesus performed. The raising of the widow's son in the town of Nain brought a response of praise from the large crowd that had gathered. The presence of Christ was recognized in the miracle that he performed with great power and authority in their presence. Their words were, "A great prophet has risen among us!" and "God has visited his people" (Lk. 7:16 [RSV])!

The compassion of Christ is witnessed in the strong words of condemnation (Lk.19:44). Entering the city of Jerusalem, he wept because of their lack of response to the significant visit that God had made. Their lack of understanding of this important visitation that was designed to provide salvation turned the moment into a time to pronounce judgment.⁴⁸ Luke makes it clear that Jesus was divinely commissioned for specific tasks and with a

⁴⁶ Carson, 649.

⁴⁷ I. Howard Marshall, The Gospel of Luke (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 90.

⁴⁸ Marshall, 718.

distinct authorization (Lk. 4:18-19). A divine train of events has been set in motion with the coming of the Christ to visit humanity. God in this act of sending his unique Son is redeeming his people (Lk. 19:9-10).

Visitation became a vital part of the ministry of Jesus and his disciples. The life of Jesus was incarnational not only in his coming, but also in the way he lived his life (Lk. 4:20), proclaimed his message (Lk. 8:1), and taught the people (Lk. 4:15). The New Testament stories tell of Jesus visiting home after home. In the home of Zacchaeus, an outcast alienated tax collector, a father and his family found their way into a community that cared. This wealthy home became a place of cleansing and restoration for a family of lost sinners (Lk. 19:1-10).

Luke highlights the account of Jesus commissioning the Twelve (Lk. 9:1-6), and then the seventy or seventy-two others (Lk. 10:1-17) to a ministry of visitation.⁴⁹ In the sending of the seventy-two, Jesus reminded them of the need for workers (10:2); warned them of the toughness of the task (10:3); helped them to understand the purpose of the mission (10:9); provided them with instruction on how to make their visits (10:4-8); reminded them of the variety of responses that might come (10:10-16); and helped them to reflect upon the rewards of the ministry they had enjoyed (10:17-24).

Jesus, often in story form, provided directives for his followers, "Go out to the roads and country lanes and make them come in, so that my house will be full" (Lk. 14:23). In training sessions, Jesus prepared his disciples in practical ways to be sensitive to the culture, so they could enter homes and effectively tell the story of salvation. Christ's teaching would prepare them to visit with people in public places,⁵⁰ as well as private homes.

⁴⁹ On textual problem see Bruce M. Metzger, "Seventy or Seventy-Two Disciples", New Testament Studies 5, (1958-59), 299-506. The NIV opts for seventy-two, the NRSV of seventy.

⁵⁰ Lk. 9:11; Lk. 8:43b-47; cf. Mk. 4:1; Jn. 5:2

One New Testament story of visitation that illustrates the significance of Christ's visitation was the encounter with two men on the Emmaus road. Here one sees the Master joining travelers along the highway and then responding to an invitation to share a meal in their home (Lk. 24:13-35). This home visit of the risen Christ brought to the folk an awareness of his identity (24:31). The visit imparted spiritual truth, recognized their hospitality, stimulated their faith and deepened their relationship with God. The visit brought a life-changing blessing to these two men in the Emmaus home (24:32-35). Although Jesus was often surrounded by crowds of people, he managed during his visitation to reach through and touch the lives of individuals (Lk. 8:43-48). The Galilean was in the business of changing people-seeking, finding, and saving the lost (Lk. 19:10). He entered the homes and lives of people to bring Good News, to heal their brokenness, to give sight to the blind, to provide release to the oppressed, and to set the captives free (Lk. 4:18-19).

Luke continues this theme of being "sent" by God to proclaim good news to the ends of the world in writing the book of Acts.⁵¹ It is the story of the birth of the church and its subsequent impact on the world. Empowered by the Holy Spirit, Christians moved out confidently to preach and witness to the gospel in a pagan society (Acts 1:8; 4:20). Dispersed from Jerusalem, they spread out over the world of their day to make a significant difference (Acts 8:4-8). They visited to find more leadership to meet the needs of people and to build the church (Acts 6:3, 7). The "sent ones" (Acts 13:3) visited churches to discover needs, to bring encouragement and to strengthen the witness about Christ (Acts 14:22; 15:36). Under the direction of the Holy Spirit, new territories were opened up to the proclamation of the gospel and the visiting missionaries witnessed converts coming to Christ and the church being

⁵¹ I. Howard Marshall, The Acts of the Apostles (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 44-46.

established (Acts 16:9-10; 16:14-15; 16:29-33; 17:11-12).

B. VISITATION - A BIBLICAL MANDATE

As has been noted in the biblical survey and particularly in John and Luke, Jesus incarnated God's visitation among humanity and modeled visitation in his ministry; in like manner he also gave the mandate to his church to visit (Jn. 20:21; Acts 1:8). In fact, Jesus carefully instructed his disciples on the practical aspects of visitation (Lk. 9:1-6; 10:1-16).

The New Testament story of the early church picks up the theme of witness and outreach to the world empowered by the divine imperative in the words, "but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

Acts tells the story of the rapid growth of the church as believers responded in obedience to the divine commission. The first followers of Jesus were highly motivated, excited about this new found faith that had transformed their lives. Luke records, "Day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Christ" (Acts 5:42).

David L. Matson, reviewing the Emmaus Road story, reminds students of the passage of the missional motifs in this highway and household visit by the Master. He traces the recurring themes in Acts of "travel" (v.13), of "teacher/missionary" (v.27), and of "mission to households" (v.29) in some of the home visits that Christ made.⁵² Matson shows a pattern that develops in the ministry of Jesus to others, including the visits to the homes of Zacchaeus, and Mary and Martha. He traces this model of ministry to households throughout

⁵² David L. Matson, Household Conversion Narratives in Acts: Pattern and Interpretation (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press Ltd., 1996), 76.

the book of Acts.

Matson notes the pattern of outreach through evangelistic home visits and puts great significance on its impact in the growth of the early church.⁵³ The house was the setting for hospitality, teaching, preaching, prayer, table fellowship, mutual support, conversion and celebration of the Lord's Supper (Acts 2:42-47).

Paul, the Apostle to the Gentiles, gave priority to encountering people on behalf of Christ, often at great personal cost according to Acts. He shared with the Ephesian elders his continuing passion for the gospel, explaining his purpose in coming, reminding them of his central teaching, all of which took place "publicly and from house to house" (Acts 20:18-21). The biblical record provides ample background to build a strong case for visitation being a priority in the programs of care-giving and of evangelism in the church.

Philip, led by the Holy Spirit, left a revival in the city of Samaria to visit with a man travelling in a chariot along a desert road from Jerusalem to Gaza (Acts 8:26). This story demonstrates the disciples' interest in visitation evangelism, a coming alongside people who were seeking spiritual help. Philip's story is an example of a personal visit where the disciple is seeking, finding, and pointing inquirers to the Saviour who is "mighty to save." Philip shared the Gospel with the foreign visitor and led him through the waters of baptism, concluding the story on a note of great joy and celebration (Acts 8:39).

Ultimately, one sees in Christ the model of effective visitation and personal witness. He clearly taught his followers to encounter people on a personal basis, often in their environment, and to share the Good News of God's amazing grace. He left the church with a clear mandate, careful

⁵³ Matson, 11.

instructions, and an empowering Presence to accomplish the task.

The biblical word ekklesia from which we get the English word "church" refers to a gathered people, a community that is called together to be the salt and light in the world (Mt. 5:13-16). Matthew records the commission given to the church at the close of his Gospel account. The marching order to the gathered community of disciples was delivered by the risen Christ: "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And surely I will be with you always to the very end" (Mt. 28:19-20).

This clear call to the early community of believers, matched by mission mandates from the other New Testament writers,⁵⁴ provides a biblical foundation to the mission of the church today-the mandate for visitation! Dr. Harry Gardner, in a Home Mission Board Manual for church planters, provides an outline of five significant points in the great commission (Mt. 28:19-20) for this study of visitation.⁵⁵

i. Go

"Going" is at the heart of the Great Commission. The first word of this commission was not "preach" but "go". Western culture and the spiritual climate of today demand that one build a strategy for mission with a focus on going. The challenge is not only to create ways for people to come through the door of the church, but the clear call of the times is also to go to "their door". Every church needs an intentional plan to reach out in love to the surrounding community.

⁵⁴ Lk. 24:47; Jn. 20:21; cf. Mk.16:15.

⁵⁵ Harry Gardner, ed., Church Planting Manual, revised. (Saint John, N.B.: Home Mission Board of the United Baptist Convention of the Atlantic Provinces, 1994), 5.

The Lausanne Covenant speaks to the issue of "going" in describing pre-evangelism. One writer puts it in these words, "Yet the prelude to proclamation is presence. For how can we share Christ with people with whom we have no contact? Hence our Christian presence in the world is indispensable to evangelism."⁵⁶

The early community of believers came together as the people who encountered Jesus and then went and told their family and friends. The church of the first century was a dynamic community of apostles or ambassadors "on-the-go." Alan Richardson defines an apostle in these words, "An apostle (Gk. *apostolos*) is one sent forth (from *apostellein*, to send forth), a messenger, especially one authorized to act in a particular matter for the one who sends him."⁵⁷ The clarion call of the Christ to the early Christians throughout his years of teaching and mentoring was to be in the midst of a dark and decaying society as "salt" (a preservative factor) and "light" (a revelatory factor).⁵⁸

Richardson's definition of apostle reminds Christians that they are sent by the One who has been given great authority by God. Jesus was recognized as "king of the Jews" in his birth, his death, and in his resurrection.⁵⁹ In his commission to the church he sends them forth with the awareness that "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me" (Mt. 28:18).

In the New Testament the pattern of apostleship was established. Jesus set the standard by reaching out beyond the religious community to people in all segments of society (Mt. 11:19). Here one finds that genuine friendships were formed and bridges were built to welcome sinners into the Kingdom of God (Mt. 9:9-13). John writes that Andrew spoke to Peter (Jn. 1:41) and Philip

⁵⁶ John Stott, ed., Making Christ Known, Historic Documents From The Lausanne Movement 1974-1989 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 22.

⁵⁷ Richardson, 20.

⁵⁸ Mt. 5:13-16.

⁵⁹ R.V.G. Tasker, The Gospel According To Matthew (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1961), 274.

found Nathaniel (Jn. 1:45) and the dynamic ministry of outreach by the apostles began.

Rick Warren, pastor of Saddleback Valley Community Church, challenges Christian leaders to measure the health of the church by its willingness to enlist, train, and send people out into the world to serve Jesus Christ. The strength of the church, he writes, "is its sending capacity rather than its seating capacity."⁶⁰

ii. Make Disciples

The work of visitation becomes of enormous value when the process of making disciples is examined. Keeping in touch with people and encouraging them in their nurture towards "maturity" is the responsibility of the church and Christian leaders. Note the instruction given to the church in Ephesus:

It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ might be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ (Eph. 4:11-13).

There is a dimension to the visitation program of the local church that provides the setting whereby people can discover a whole new life in Jesus Christ. The biblical record has many stories of lives being transformed when encountered by Jesus Christ in their home. Amazing behavioral changes are recorded. Luke writes the account of a wealthy tax collector's promise to pay back four times the amount of money to anyone he had cheated through his business, and to give half of his estate to the poor (Lk. 19:1-10). Zacchaeus was clearly a changed man!

One of the tasks of the Christian visitor is to bring people to faith in

⁶⁰ Rick Warren, The Purpose Driven Church (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 32.

Christ through proclamation of the Gospel by word and life. The consequence of that witness will be new believers in Christ. Paul sums up his ministry by saying "we persuade men" (2 Cor. 5:11).⁶¹ Luke records the stories of household conversions in Philippi when Paul shared the gospel with Lydia (Acts 16:14) and then the jailer (Acts 16:32). In both of these home visits there was a warm response to the message of Jesus Christ and a willingness to demonstrate a life-changing commitment. In both situations the believers were baptized and then they welcomed the messengers back to their homes for hospitality and Christian fellowship (Acts 16:15, 34).

The willingness of Paul and his evangelistic team to come alongside the women in their place of prayer (Acts 16:13), and to lift their praise to God in prison (Acts 16:25), demonstrates the truth that "Christians are to be good news before they can share good news."⁶² The music of the gospel was being lived out in the everyday relationships of Paul and his friends as they were reaching out to disciple the people of Philippi. The Macedonian call "to preach the gospel to them" (Acts. 16:10b) would not mean the crafting of a sermon for a Sunday morning worship service but rather the telling of the story of Jesus with grace, love, and power, to strangers in unfamiliar settings.

iii. Of All Nations

The heart of the Saviour is seen in this phrase. The letter to Timothy urges the readers to prayer, unity, and holy living because of the desire of the triune God, " who desires everyone to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim. 2:4 [NRSV]). David W. Shenk and Ervin R. Stutzman share their understanding of the "nations" in these words:

⁶¹ Stott, 22.

⁶² Joseph C. Aldrich, Life-Style Evangelism (Portland: Multnomah Press, 1981), 20.

The "nations" referred to in Christ's great commission are the people groups of the world, not nations as we think of the geographical or political boundaries today... the original Greek word is ethnos, from which we derive the English word ethnic. Jesus desired that the gospel be preached to every ethnic group. In fact, just before his death, Jesus asserted that history would not be complete until the gospel was proclaimed to all nations as a testimony to all people (Matthew 24:14).⁶³

The New Testament continually moves the thinking of the church's mission into wider and wider circles.⁶⁴ The beginning task was to the house of Israel (Lk.5:10; Acts 1:8) but the final mandate was to all the world (Mt.28:19; Acts 1:8). The writer of Acts records how Paul's title of missionary to the Gentiles took on new meaning when he heard the messenger from Macedonia call in the night, "Come over to Macedonia and help us" (Acts 16: 9). Jesus was consistently pushing the redemptive love of God into wider and wider realms of people groups (Jn. 4:7-26; 5: 1-15).

The visitation program in the local church can bring an awareness of the scope of the mission field that surrounds every local church. There are many people groups within the environment of the church's ministry. The visitation team may visit 1) shut-ins, 2) hospital patients, 3) nursing homes, 4) new mothers, 5) teenagers, 6) single parents, 7) prisoners, and 8) immigrants. Looking at the opportunities to reach out and disciple people from these many different people groups around a local church community demands effort, thought, and at times risk.

⁶³ David W. Shenk and Ervin R. Stutzman, Creating Communities of the Kingdom (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1988), 144.

⁶⁴ I. Howard Marshall, Acts, 60-61.

Aldrich, in his book *Life-Style Evangelism*, suggests that the model of Jesus Christ moves Christians into exciting new areas of discipleship outside the religious community. It is harder to build bridges than it is to build walls. Yet, the rewards of reaching the unchurched are both dynamic and faith-building. He encourages believers to go to all peoples when he writes, "Yet Christians, alive to God, loving, caring, laughing, sharing, involved in the point of people's need, present an undeniable witness for Christ in their society."⁶⁵

The theme of God's people being a blessing to the world is woven throughout the biblical story. God informs Abraham that it is his plan to "bless him" and "make his people a great nation" so that "all peoples on earth will be blessed" (Gen. 12:2-3).⁶⁶ The harvest field has no fences or borders, and Christ calls the church to move outward to complete the unfinished task. It was the witness of a Samaritan women and the amazing response from the city of Sychar that led Jesus to announce the urgency and immediacy of the evangelistic task to his disciples: "Do you not say, 'Four months more and then the harvest'? I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest" (Jn. 4:35). The response to the gospel may come in unexpected places and in unexpected numbers (Jn. 4:39-42).

iv. Baptizing and Teaching

Visitation uncovers the spiritual hunger of many people today. There is a call for baptism! There is call for teaching! People are looking for a place to belong and a faith to believe in. One author writing about the spiritual hunger in contemporary culture added a note of hope and expectation for the church visitor:

⁶⁵ Aldrich, 11.

⁶⁶ Hunter, 7.

For all the pervasive secularism of our country (and the world) and the well-documented unravelling of civility, marriage, family life, and community, there are strong signs that people, so immersed in flat one-dimensional living, are reacting. They are seeking the numinous. They are hungry for the transcendent.⁶⁷

In the New Testament accounts one discovers that the fruits of the apostles' visitation were disciples whom they baptized and taught (Acts 10:34; 16: 31-34). The Bible traces the practice of baptism back into the stories of the Old Testament (2 Kgs. 5:14).⁶⁸ Baptism was used for the washing of proselytes with an emphasis on the rite of purification. However, Christian baptism finds its greatest springboard in the baptismal practices of John (Mk. 1:4ff.; Jn. 1:25ff.; cf. Acts 1:5; 11:16)⁶⁹ This baptism put great ethical demands on the elect and had significant eschatological meaning. Cleansing, connected with repentance, is the main point of baptism in John's ministry and teaching.⁷⁰

Jesus submitted to John's baptism as an act of support or affirmation. Jesus did not baptize but left that practice to his disciples (Jn. 4:2). The messianic mandate is proclaimed in his baptism as the sinless Son of God identifies with sinful humanity and in the Jordan river undergoes the symbolic act of cleansing (Mk. 1:4-5; Mt. 3:15). In baptism the believer makes his confession of faith in Jesus Christ who has reconciled the world to God through his sacrificial death on the cross at Calvary. The baptismal act symbolizes the Christian's identification with Christ in his death and resurrection (Rom. 6:4). Further, it is viewed as a rite of initiation into the church, the body of Christ (Acts 2:41).

The practice of baptism in the early church rests primarily on the command of the resurrected Christ (Mt. 28:19). The importance of baptism

⁶⁷ Baush, 82.

⁶⁸ Bromiley, 93. The occasion of Naaman's dipping in the Jordan, where he was miraculously cured of his leprosy, possibly had some sacramental significance.

⁶⁹ Bromiley, 93.

⁷⁰ Bromiley, 93.

was communicated by the early church leaders in their teaching and writing (Acts 2:38). Ephesians speaks of baptism as a basis of unity in the community of faith (Eph. 4:5). The biblical record clearly points to the wholistic approach to evangelism that proclaimed Christ, disciplined converts, baptised and taught them the Scriptures and folded them into the life of the church (Acts 16:13-15, 40).

Matthew's Gospel points to teaching as a prominent focus in the ministry of Jesus (Mt. 4:23; 9:35; 11:1). The Old Testament demonstrates that the teaching is volitional as well as intellectual and is primarily focused on "God's will."⁷¹ Jesus brings this theme into his teaching as he builds on the plan of God revealed through the prophets and points to its application in the present and the future (Lk. 24:25-27). The disciples listened to Jesus and began to teach the things they had been taught to others (Mk. 6:30). The apostle's work was to proclaim the gospel, call for commitments, baptize the new believers, welcome them into the fellowship and build them into mature servants who could evangelize and equip others.⁷² The task is not yet finished and the imperatives of Jesus continues to challenge the church today.

The writer has found the home visit an opportune time to evangelize and provide discipleship training. People in the privacy of their homes are often open to ask the difficult questions. The home visit provides an opportunity for a seeker to build a personal relationship with the messenger and to acquire biblical understanding that will provide a spiritual foundation for life. The combination of "go" and "teach" provides a means of personal growth in the life of the people (pastor and/or laity) who share the visit. It was Peter who reminded those who followed the Christ: "Always be prepared to give an

⁷¹ Bromiley, 161.

⁷² Robert E. Coleman, The Master Plan of Evangelism (Westwood: Fleming H. Revell, 1963), 108-109.

answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect..." (1 Pet. 3:15-16).

The gathered church was commissioned to teach the new believers "to obey everything that I have commanded you" (Mt. 28:20). The believer is brought into a new experience of how to live the Christian life. The gospel is good news in its message of forgiveness from sin and reconciliation with God in Jesus Christ. It leads the believer to a beautiful new life of righteousness in relationship with the Lord Jesus (Phil. 3:7-11).⁷³ The messengers of the cross communicated, with great passion, the life and teachings of Jesus Christ everywhere they went (Acts 8:4ff.)

The focus of the teaching was on the person, practice, and place of Jesus in their lives. It was important for the believer to be informed. After the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost and the assimilation of three thousand new believers into the church in Jerusalem, Luke records that "they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching" (Acts 2:42a). Teaching became an integral part of their community life.

The apostolic teaching included the presentation of the life and crucifixion of Jesus (Acts 2:22-23). They also proclaimed the glory of his resurrection to which they had been witnesses (Acts 1:21; 2:24). The apostles were students of the Old Testament scriptures and taught about the fulfillment of God's promise in the arrival of Jesus Christ as the Messiah (Jn. 1:41; Acts 4:27). Their teaching called people to make a response, to come to repentance and faith (Acts 2:38).

The commission of Christ calls the church to a learning experience that is more than collecting information.⁷⁴ It was important that the truth they learned be applied to life. Aldrich writes: "Unfortunately, most people who are

⁷³ Myron S. Augsburger, *Matthew* (Waco: Word Book Publishers, 1982), 331.

⁷⁴ R.E. Nixon, *Matthew, The New Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970), 850.

exposed to doctrine alone usually sit, soak, and sour. This is true because impression minus expression leads to spiritual depression."⁷⁵ The teaching process here in Matthew's record is a call to active learning that leads to mature and dynamic discipleship, moving the pupil from criticism to commitment, and from consumer to contributor to the cause of Christ. The observing community was attracted to the early church as they witnessed the behaviour of these people being transformed by the teachings of Jesus (Acts 2:47).

v. Christ With You

The writer has discovered that there are many reasons that prevent people in the church from making visits. The sense of incompetence is often an expressed barrier to visiting on behalf of the church. There is a fear of the unknown. "What questions will they ask me that I cannot answer?" "What will be their expectations when I come visiting on behalf of Christ and the church?" "Do I know enough to be able to teach others?" "What if I do more harm to the gospel than good when I make the visit?" Kenneth S. Hemphill speaks to these often spoken and sometimes unspoken fears:

Going with the gospel will provide results because it is backed with a promise: "I am with you always"(Mt. 28:20, NASB). Many Christians fail to go because they are afraid that they might fail. The only antidote for fear is the presence of the resurrected Lord... The promise of God's presence also assures us of His provision. The resources for effective witnessing do not depend on our boldness or cleverness of speech, but on His supernatural provision.⁷⁶

The commission of Christ to the fledgling church was filled with support and assurances. There is in this passage the clear promise of his

⁷⁵ Aldrich, 106.

⁷⁶ Kenneth S. Hemphill, "Going... At the Heart of the Great Commission", Harry M. Piland, Comp. Going...One on One (Nashville: Convention Press, 1994), 17.

abiding presence throughout the process of fulfilling the mandate (Mt. 28:20b). The Christian community is not replacing the ministry of Christ but entering into a partnership with Christ.⁷⁷ His present mission continues and is effective in their ministry (Jn. 14:12-14).⁷⁸ They "go", "disciple", "baptize" and "teach" in the possession, power, presence, protection, and authority of Christ.⁷⁹

D. A. Carson, in his commentary on themes from Matthew, provides a summary of the support Christ offers to his commissioned church. Certainly there is the promise of success and triumph in the task they have been given. Also, there is the record of the book ending not with a commission but a promise that Jesus will be with his disciples "the whole of every day" and "to the very end of the age" (Mt. 28:20).⁸⁰ Carson adds further confidence to the church in its fulfillment of the great commission:

Here is the fulfillment of the promises to the Gentiles; here is the mandate to pass on all the teaching of Jesus that Matthew so carefully preserved; here is the fruit of the trainee mission recorded in Matthew 10; here is the authority or reign of Jesus already in operation; here is the forward-looking anticipation of the consummation to come ("at the end of the age," 28:20).⁸¹

The biblical mandate can easily be applied to the ministry of visitation in the local church. Members are challenged to respond to the needs of people within the community of faith who need fellowship, teaching, and encouragement in their spiritual journey. Further, the mission reaches beyond other believers to the homes and hearts of those who need to hear the life-transforming message of a God, who has reached down in the incarnate Christ, to lift up those who are lost and in need of redemption (Rom. 10:14-15).

⁷⁷ Carson, 648.

⁷⁸ Beasley-Murray, 380.

⁷⁹ George A. Buttrick, "The Gospel According to St. Matthew", The Interpreter's Bible Vol. VII (New York: Abingdon Press, 1951), 624.

⁸⁰ D.A. Carson, God With Us, Themes From Matthew (Ventura: Regal Books, 1985), 163.

⁸¹ Carson, 624.

C. VISITATION - THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

i. Priesthood of Believers

Alongside the biblical survey and biblical mandate already examined, are a number of theological concepts coming out of the biblical texts. These provide a foundation for providing a ministry of pastoral care and outreach to the community through visitation. These concepts will be explored and applied to the thesis proposal, the evaluation of a visitation program in the local church.

The priesthood of all believers has been through the years a Baptist emphasis. It has biblical and historical roots worth exploring. However, the word "ministry" suggests to many today (including Baptists), a group of workers set aside for preaching and pastoral oversight in the church.⁸² The mandate of the Bible is about the equipping of "all God's people" for ministry in the church and in the world (Eph. 4:11-13). Dr. Ron Watts writes, "Baptists believe that ministry-the task of making Jesus Christ known in word and deed-is the responsibility of the entire church of Christ. Every believer is a minister."⁸³

The challenge for the church today is to help both pastoral leadership and membership to understand this distinctive and to put it into practice. A visitor from England shared with the writer that in his Baptist church at home many would not feel the importance of a visit if it were not from the ordained clergy. The responsibility of pastoral care in the minds of many is reserved for the ordained pastor. This is even sometimes the understanding and practice of the ordained pastor. The writer asked a young pastor if he ever shared the visitation ministry with the laity of his church. His response was, "No. I

⁸² Russell F. Aldwinkle, Things Most Surely Believed, a Baptist View (Toronto: The Commission on Baptist Witness, Baptist Convention of Ontario and Quebec, 1965), 40.

⁸³ Ronald F. Watts, The Ordinances and Ministry of the Church: A Baptist View (Toronto: Canadian Baptist Federation, 1986), 27.

believe that is my responsibility. The people in the church would not share their deeper spiritual concerns if another member of the congregation was present."

Melvin J. Steinbron in his book, *Can The Pastor Do It Alone?* challenges the belief that only ordained persons are capable of pastoral responsibilities. Steinbron writes out of years of pastoral experience where he has discovered the value of calling, training, and commissioning the laity in pastoral care in the local church. He writes about his church's experience:

We have discovered that, indeed, lay people can pastor. In fact, we have discovered that often lay people's pastoring gifts are stronger than those of many ordained clergy. Lay people, gifted by the Spirit of God, called into pastoring, given the authority by the laying on of hands by the elders, are authentically pastoring.⁸⁴

The word for ministry, diakonia, has a broad meaning in the New Testament. It refers to the service that all believers are called to perform. A Christian is a disciple, a follower of Christ. It was Jesus who came among us as a servant (Mt. 20:28; Jn. 13:2-17). Therefore the ministry of Christians is to follow in the footsteps of the serving Master (Jn. 20:21). Baptists have always accepted in principle the conviction that all ministry flows from the ministry of the Saviour.⁸⁵

The word "priest" has had an evolution in its meaning. A priest in the Old Testament was primarily someone who stood in the Levitical succession and served the people on behalf of God (Deut. 8:1).⁸⁶ The priest's task was to ascertain the will of God (1 Sam. 23: 6-12) and to instruct the people and offer sacrifices (Hag. 2:11-13).⁸⁷

⁸⁴ Melvin J. Steinbron, Can the Pastor Do It Alone? (Ventura: Regal Books, 1987), 15.

⁸⁵ Aldwinkle, 41.

⁸⁶ Alan Richardson, A Theological Word Book of the Bible (London: SCM Press, 1950), 210.

⁸⁷ Richardson, 210-211.

The reformation period in church history stressed the priesthood of all believers, but this meant primarily that all believers have direct access to God through Christ. Luther re-interpreted the notion of priesthood as understood in his day and defined its essential character as "loving service, intercession, and sacrificial self-giving, the supreme pattern of which were the life and death of our Lord himself."⁸⁸

The church began to see that ministry belonged not to a small elite group but to the whole people of God (1 Cor. 12:12). The authority to serve was given not to a select group but to the whole Church that lives in the Spirit under the Lordship of Christ.⁸⁹ The power of this reality is a witness in the world. Carl Henry once said, "The Kingdom of God is mirrored in the fellowship of the redeemed who seek to do God's will on earth."⁹⁰

Even though there was a growing awareness of the biblical truth of the priesthood belonging to the people of God, in practice the leadership of the church continued to be dominated by the clergy. There were a few exceptions among the smaller evangelical groups (e.g., Plymouth Brethren).

Baptists and other churches have at times seriously misinterpreted the priesthood of believers. For example, the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers has led some to claim that they have the right to act and think as individuals apart from any significant reference to the church as a whole. The role of priest in the New Testament is seen in relationship to the church as a whole and its cooperative responsibilities (1 Pet. 2:5, 9; Rev. 1:6; 5:10, 20;6). Again, the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers is not meant to downgrade ordained clergy but to assert the high calling of every believer.⁹¹ Also, there is

⁸⁸ Aldwinkle, 41.

⁸⁹ Francis Davidson, Romans. The New Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids: Intervarsity Press, 1970), 895.

⁹⁰ David Haney, The Idea of The Laity (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1973), 29.

⁹¹ Dennis L. Butcher, Developing the Caring Community: A Ten -Week Course in Pastoral Care Ministry for Laity (Bethesda: The Alban Institute, 1994), 3.

the issue of order and structure that gives balance and direction to the ministry. This need not be seen as an enemy to one having genuine faith. Rather there is the need to blend together institutional and spiritual principles in the development of ministry in the local church.⁹²

David Smith outlines the historical development of the practice of the priesthood of all believers and notes the recent implementation of the principle in the life of the church:

It was not until the second half of the twentieth century that a strong movement toward the ministry of all God's people took place. People like the great Quaker leader Elton Trueblood stressed that the laity are intended by God to be his ministers. It is now generally accepted that all God's people are to be his ministers.⁹³

While one might agree with this biblical/theological position on the priesthood of all believers, the formidable task is to make it happen in the church's ministry. The change of thinking and practice need to come from pastor and people alike. R. Paul Stevens writes about the need for dramatic change in the church's thinking as the pastor moves from "solo actor" to "trainer".

The pastor as equipper provides a refreshing alternative to the pastor as solo virtuoso. But the full liberation of the laity will require a gracious conspiracy of clergy and laity. As things now stand, it is easier for the pastor to continue to do ministry alone and easier for the laity to rent a shepherd to do it for them. Both need something like a conversion to release them for ministry in the body and through it to the world.⁹⁴

The writer is convinced that this doctrine of the priesthood of all believers can transform the local church in its ministry of visitation. It provides

⁹² Aldwinkle, 42.

⁹³ David L. Smith, *All God's People: A Theology of the Church* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1996), 354.

⁹⁴ R. Paul Stevens, *Liberating The Laity. Equipping All The Saints For Ministry* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1985), 110.

the theological footing upon which to build a program of lay pastoral care and effective evangelistic outreach in the local congregation. The model of Christ calling men to share his ministry (Mt. 1:16-20; cf. Mt. 4:18-22) and Paul moving out in mission with a team of associates (Acts 15: 40; 16:3) should encourage the church to be challenging its people to come alongside the pastoral leadership in fulfilling its responsibility to God and the world.

ii. Picture of Community

The model church is described in the gathered community that met in Jerusalem after the remarkable demonstration of spiritual power on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:42-47). Thousands responded to the proclamation of the gospel. They identified with Christ in their baptism and were welcomed into the community of faith (Acts 2:38-41). They began to experience a new life within the church. The New Testament uses a number of metaphors to describe the church. It is referred to as "the bride of Christ" (Rev. 21:2); "the temple of God" (1 Cor. 3:16); "the household of faith" (Gal. 6:10); "the body of Christ" (1 Cor.12:12).⁹⁵

From the earliest times theologians framed an understanding of the nature of the church around the biblical picture of "the body of Christ". Paul picks up this theme in his letter to the church in Corinth. In the context of a very divided and somewhat chaotic community, Paul explores in a variety of ways the theme of unity in the church, "the body of Christ" (1 Cor. 14:26). Mission and evangelism⁹⁶ are the mandate of the church and not options one can choose when weather permits.⁹⁷ In order for Christian witness to have any

⁹⁵ For more metaphors see Paul Minear, Images of the Church in the New Testament (Philadelphia: Westminster Press), 1960.

⁹⁶ Mk.16:15; Lk. 24:47; Jn. 20:21; Acts 1:8.

⁹⁷ Carl E. Braaten, The Apostolic Imperative: Nature and Aim of The Church's Mission and Ministry (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1985), 61.

influence in the world it must flow from a healthy, vibrant fellowship of believers. The impact of the evangelistic efforts will be directly proportional to the health of the corporate life.⁹⁸

Paul shows the work of the Holy Spirit as the power to bring the people together in the body of Christ. It is the fellowship of the Spirit which gives the dynamic unity and true fellowship to the followers of the Nazarene.⁹⁹ Paul spoke often on this theme of "oneness" in the body life of the church (Rom. 12:5; 1 Cor. 1:10; 12:12, 27; Gal. 3:28). He pointed to the practical foolishness of being independent (1 Cor. 12:14-26). The body cannot consist of only one part (1 Cor. 12:19)! It is the diversity of the parts that makes the body beautiful and functional.¹⁰⁰ A sign of a healthy church is that it has both unity in diversity and diversity within its unity. The church, like the human body, is a living organism and each part has an important part to play (1 Cor. 12:14-19).

The church has a function just as the body has a function. The church as the body of Christ reflects the Saviour's character and purpose in the daily lives of its members. They were to "be" the good news before they "shared" the good news. They were called to bear witness to Jesus in the home, the community and everywhere they went (Acts 1:8). The first believers discovered that they needed to be healthy to fulfill their responsibility. Their health, strength, encouragement, rebuke, motivation, all flowed out of their fellowship with other believers (Acts 2:42-47). The church became the key to their spiritual growth.¹⁰¹ The individual believer grew stronger because of contact with the gifts of the entire body and not just the pastor of the church on Sunday morning.¹⁰² The result of this healthy connection and overwhelming

⁹⁸ Aldrich, 18.

⁹⁹ Aldrich, 108.

¹⁰⁰ Davidson, 985.

¹⁰¹ Aldrich, 108.

¹⁰² Aldrich, 108.

support is a dynamic witness that brings honour to Christ and his body, the church.

By being the presence of Christ in the world, Christians are called at times to encounter the dark places and be a light for the Saviour.¹⁰³ The priority of the church is to preach the good news and evangelize a lost world (Lk. 24:45-49). Believers are called to a multitude of ministries as the body of Christ in the community, such as releasing the oppressed (Lk. 4:18) and visiting the sick and the imprisoned (Mt. 25:36). The church is responsible for doing everything within its power to lift the burdens of the weak and struggling of this world.¹⁰⁴

iii. Profile of Leadership

a. Servant Leader

Leadership is a key component in both the development and sustaining of an effective visitation program in the local church. The most pronounced biblical model of leadership is defined in the designation "to serve." The word for "servant" in Hebrew is ebed. It can be found in nearly 800 places in the Old Testament and refers primarily to a worker.¹⁰⁵ The word "servant" can also refer to a slave, the property of a master or lord. At times a slave can hold a position of great trust and responsibility as Joseph did in Egypt or as Eliezer did in Abraham's household (Gen.15:2). The servant or slave of men can hold a different meaning from the servant or slave of God. Being referred to as "a servant of the Lord" can be a title of distinction or honor given to those who have shown special devotion or rendered distinguished service to God (e.g., Abraham in Gen. 26:24; Moses in Ex. 14:31; David in 2 Sam. 3:18).¹⁰⁶

¹⁰³ Smith, 170-171.

¹⁰⁴ Braaten, 75.

¹⁰⁵ Richardson, 223.

¹⁰⁶ Richardson, 224.

The Greek word doulos, meaning "a slave," is the designation most often used for servant in the New Testament. Being the slave of men was viewed in a negative light but being a slave of God was a positive experience. Greeks viewed servanthood as lacking in dignity: they thought they were born to lead and not to serve. It only had a positive side when it promoted individual development.¹⁰⁷ Judaism moved the concept of servanthood a little further toward a positive light when the definition meant, "to wait on table", "to obey" and even to "render priestly service".¹⁰⁸

Jesus is the primary biblical model of servant leadership. D. A. Carson, in his commentary on John, points to the power of Christ's teaching and modeling of servant leadership. The gospel writer sets the stage for a dramatic presentation of leadership (Jn. 13:1-17). He pictures here in this biblical passage a confident Christ who knows to whom he belongs, the source of his authority, and his purpose in life and his destiny (Jn. 13:1-3). Servanthood does not come out of weakness. There is no sense of Christ being forced into this behavior. The Master operated out of a strong sense of personal identity.¹⁰⁹ Jesus, in contrast to the cultural norm (being Teacher and Lord), takes off his outer garments and wraps a towel around his waist. He then takes a basin of water and begins to wash the disciples' feet. The dress, at that point, is what a menial servant would wear. The washing of feet was a task performed by the lowliest hireling. Both the dress and service would be looked down on by people in Gentile or Jewish circles. It was a moment of profound truth. Carson describes the event in these words: "His act of humility is as unnecessary as it is stunning, and is a display of love (Jn.13:1), a symbol of saving cleansing

¹⁰⁷ Bromiley, 152.

¹⁰⁸ Bromiley, 152.

¹⁰⁹ Leighton Ford, Transforming Leadership, Jesus' Way of Creating Vision, Shaping Values & Empowering Change (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1991), 153.

(Jn.13:6-9), and a model of Christian conduct (Jn.13:12-17)".¹¹⁰

The foot-washing event was a parable of the greater cleansing and the act of servant leadership that Jesus would accomplish through his redemptive death. The ultimate demonstration of servant leadership is seen on the cross at Calvary. Peter's negative response to having his feet washed by Jesus at this point illustrates the lack of understanding of the meaning of servant leadership by the disciples and the importance of their learning it (vv. 6-8; vv.12-20).¹¹¹

The leadership issue surfaced from time to time among the disciples of Jesus in the gospel story. Luke records the story of the dispute that arose at the final supper Jesus had with the disciples before the crucifixion. The debate was over greatness, authority, power, and position. The Master responded to their inner longing with a discussion of the importance of servanthood (Lk. 22:24-27). He made it clear to them that they were not to "lord it over others" as they observed in society but to follow his model. He said to them, "Instead, the greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves...I am among you as one who serves" (Lk. 22:26, 27b).

The question of servant leadership has practical impact on the life of the church today. It was the servant authority of Jesus that attracted the disciples of his day and made them eager to follow him. It is those who quietly, humbly serve who earn the mantle of leadership.¹¹² This style of leadership can create the setting for a valid and vital ministry within the church and the community. George Barna points this out perceptively:

... [If] a pastor allows himself to be perceived as the dominant minister, the chances of people feeling a strong motivation to engage in the work of the church are minimized. It is important for the pastor to instill in people the understanding that Christian

¹¹⁰ Carson, 462-463.

¹¹¹ Beasley-Murray, 233, 236.

¹¹² Stedman, 363.

leadership is servanthood in practice.¹¹³

The authority to function as a leader in ministry comes from Christ's call and the recognition of that call by the church. Leaders are people **under** authority (author's emphasis). Paul makes this truth clear in his letter to the church in Colossae where some members were confused in their thinking and acting in a way that dishonoured Christ and the church (Col.1:18; 2:19). Spiritual gifts are given to believers by God for the special purpose of edifying others and building up the church and its ministry (Eph. 4:12). Respect needed to lead in ministry has to be earned. C. Peter Wagner has wisely observed:

When a pastor realizes he is an under-shepherd, receiving his authority from the Word of God, he gives authoritative leadership... When the pastor localizes power in his personality, he gives authoritarian leadership.¹¹⁴

Steinbron adds, "The difference is between lordship and leadership. Only Jesus is Lord! You and I are servants."¹¹⁵

Pastors and people are challenged by the biblical model of Jesus Christ and by the wisdom of contemporary writing to continue to examine their leadership styles and search for ways to improve. In contrast to the lure of contemporary culture, Christ calls church leaders to follow in his footsteps and be willing to "wash one another's feet" (Jn. 13: 14b).

b. Equipping Mentor

Don Posterski and Gary Nelson, in *Future Faith Churches*, speak of the role of leadership in recruiting others when they write: "Future faith leaders believe the church is a partnership. They are secure about their role as leaders

¹¹³ Barna, 156.

¹¹⁴ Steinbron, 114.

¹¹⁵ Steinbron, 114.

in the church, but they invite others to share in the possibilities of ministry."¹¹⁶

The biblical account of the New Testament church is the story of a shared leadership, and Paul, in Ephesians, points to the many spiritual gifts in the life of the congregation (Eph. 4:11-13). It is important for the health of the church that these people with gifts be trained and given the opportunity to exercise their spiritual gifts in ministry. If they do not have this opportunity to serve, then their own spiritual lives become stagnant, stunted, and unfulfilled. On the other hand, the employment of spiritual gifts brings to the believer the joy of service and personal spiritual growth and to the church the strengthening of its witness.

The ascended Christ, according to the book of Ephesians, gave leaders as gifts to the church "to prepare God's people for works of service" (Eph. 4:12a) This passage has become a key biblical text in the ministry of equipping one another to serve in the body of Christ. It defines one of the indispensable tasks of leadership in each and every church and presents the view of ministry as the task of many hearts and hands.¹¹⁷ This leadership style was taught and modeled in the lives and ministries of both Jesus and Paul. Jesus carefully picked and mentored the Twelve (Lk. 9:1-6) and then he called and trained the seventy-two (Lk. 10:1-16). Among many other associates, Paul discovered a young disciple named Timothy (Acts 16:1-4), whom he invited to share in the ministry. He instructed and mentored this gifted young leader and eventually challenged him to the same ministry of equipping others: He wrote to him, "And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others" (2 Tim. 2:2).

William Easum echoes Paul's teaching in a modern context. He writes,

¹¹⁶ Don Posterski and Gary Nelson, Future Faith Churches (Winfield: Wood Lake Books Inc., 1997), 114.

¹¹⁷ Davidson, 1024.

"Mentors/ Midwives lead by equipping others to lead in the area of their spiritual gifts. Their goal is to bring out the hidden spiritual gifts and talents that lie buried within others."¹¹⁸ Easum is clear in pointing out the long-term benefits to the church of focusing on the equipping of the saints. He speaks of the struggle and yet sees the long-term benefit of a mentoring ministry.¹¹⁹ James L. Blevins adds to this discussion of equipping the people of God for ministry when he writes about the training of the twelve disciples. He notes that Jesus brought together a strange mix of common people to lead his mission:

Fishermen and tax collectors, political revolutionaries and "turncoats," "quick witted" and slow to learn, and those who lived up their potential and those who did not. It is evident that Jesus chose a cross section of humanity. He did not select only the strong of faith or the intellectual giants, rather he called persons just like you and me.¹²⁰

These were the people into whom Jesus poured his life during his three years of itinerant ministry. He was preparing them for the day when they would be the leaders in the work and witnesses of the living God (Mk. 3:14-15). Blevins applies this equipping concept to the church in the present:

The modern day disciple, just like the twelve, needs to be equipped for his task and mission. The church must become the place where this training is given. The minister is probably the best-qualified person to equip others to aid in the task of ministry. He is the one with the theological skills needed for the equipping job. The minister should view his ministry as an opportunity to prepare others to carry on the work of Christ. Lay people need to redefine the traditional view of the minister; he should not be hired to do all the ministry of the church. If the pastor uses his time wisely in equipping others, soon there will be many teams out on the field serving instead of just one. When

¹¹⁸ William M. Easum, Sacred Cows Make Gourmet Burgers (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995), 83.

¹¹⁹ Easum, 85.

¹²⁰ James L. Blevins, "Biblical Interpretation", John Hendrix and Lloyd Householder, eds., The Equipping of Disciples (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1977), 20.

he leaves, the work will continue instead of falling apart. Spending time equipping individuals is why Jesus spent so much time with the disciples.¹²¹

The biblical story of the call and equipping of the disciple Matthew provides a vivid model of the method Jesus used to develop leadership (Mt. 9:9-12). This illustrates the Master's spiritual mentoring and spiritual empowerment. The first lesson is the beauty of acceptance. Matthew was an extremely unpopular person in his culture. Tax collecting was a hated occupation in Israel. The reasons were many. In the first place they were often dishonest. After paying a fixed amount to Rome to buy the job, they were tempted to pocket the excess. The tax collectors worked for the Roman bosses and were seen as disloyal by fellow Jews. They were considered traitors and conspirators with a foreign government.¹²²

The Bible reports, "As Jesus went on from there, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax collector's booth. 'Follow me,' he told him, and Matthew got up and followed him" (Mt. 9:9). Here is one New Testament account of Jesus calling, equipping, and empowering people for Kingdom leadership. Looking at the man collecting taxes one might be tempted to ask, "What did Jesus see?"

Jesus saw on the fringe of society a person created in the image of God. He saw a man needing forgiveness and freedom from personal bondage. He saw a person longing for something better. Jesus saw in Matthew, the religious outcast, a potential Kingdom leader. He said to Matthew, "Follow me" (Mt. 9:9).

The biblical account of Matthew's call points to the Master's recognition of leadership gifts. Jesus affirms the tax collector's gift of hospitality by attending a meal at his home (Lk. 5:29). His gift for evangelism was evident

¹²¹ Blevins, 21-22.

¹²² Leslie B. Flynn, The Twelve (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1982), 102.

when the story reports, "While Jesus was having dinner at Matthew's home, many tax collectors and 'sinners' came and ate with him and his disciples" (Mt. 9:10).

Jesus used every opportunity to equip his leaders. They were called to be co-workers in reaching the world and the task would not be easy. He took this moment to teach them how to respond to the criticism of the religious establishment. He focused their attention on the mission he wanted to fulfill.

Arthur H. Criscoe provides some helpful insights into the method of teaching employed by Jesus in the biblical account:

True learning is always transformation; it goes beyond mere "knowing" and emphasizes "becoming." The process of equipping disciples grows out of this view of learning. It is an interpersonal, transactional, and experiential process involving both teacher and learner in a wide range of real life experiences.¹²³

Criscoe underlines vital elements in the training method used by Jesus; modeling and association. Pointing to the modeling he writes, "The teacher must embody and demonstrate in his own life the attitudes, values, and concepts he would teach. It is not trite to say that discipleship is more caught than taught."¹²⁴ Criscoe then looks at the element he calls association:

Teacher and learner must be together in a relational and interpersonal context. The learning process is a living participation in the social matrix of a corporate life. Education is at its best when teacher and learner live out the truth together, and experience practical truth in a context of acceptance.¹²⁵

Paul Stevens in his book, *Liberating the Laity*, writes of the risks of mentoring in today's confused church culture. The risk of the equipper

¹²³ Arthur H. Criscoe, "Implications for Equipping Disciples", John Hendrix and Lloyd Householder, eds., The Equipping of Disciples (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1977), 22.

¹²⁴ Criscoe, 22.

¹²⁵ Criscoe, 22.

becoming burned out due to lack of attention to his own spiritual needs is high. Stevens reports that the pressing need of leadership today is "depth, discernment and discipline."¹²⁶ The leader must be aware of superficial spirituality and the risks of being drawn away from the real issues. One area is the shallow relationships that result from serving out of the will of God, serving for the praise of men or to acquire more influence and power. An equipper may find that he has been building relationships to please the expectations of peers or parishioners rather than the purposes of God. A quick and willing response to the invitation of Jesus to "come and see" (Jn. 1:39) can make a significant difference in rebuilding healthy relationships.¹²⁷

One's relationship with God gives rise to one's ministry. This became a part of the equipping offered to the seventy-two that Jesus sent out two by two to share the good news. They returned with hearts overflowing from the results of their mission. They had witnessed the power of God transforming lives (Lk. 10:17). However, Jesus puts their enthusiasm into perspective by reminding them that the priority in their lives was the significant relationship they had with the Father (Lk. 10:20). Thus, the equipping leader who seeks to mentor people towards a mature discipleship needs always to be aware of the source and substance of ministry. Paul reminded the Thessalonian believers that God is the author, Christ the substance, and the people of God the agents of the gospel (1 Thess. 2:9-11).¹²⁸

c. Vision Caster

A recent survey of Protestant churches in America revealed that less than four percent have an articulated vision statement that has been heard,

¹²⁶ Stevens, 152.

¹²⁷ Carson, 225.

¹²⁸ John R. Stott, The Message of Thessalonians, The Gospel & The End of Time (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 1991), 32.

understood, accepted and embraced by the congregations. The response recognized that most churches were in decline, inward-looking, and aging. Also, the survey noted that the pastoral leadership had not won the confidence of the people well enough to be able to play the role of visionary leader. Every church that has a vital vision in place has a visionary leader.¹²⁹

A clearly framed and carefully communicated vision can profoundly shape the local church and its ministry of pastoral care and outreach. It can arouse the passion of the people and call them to deeper commitment. A congregation that has taken ownership of a vision will work with more energy, efficiency, and expectation.

Leadership is responsible for coordinating and articulating a vision for the ministry of the church. In the book, *Future Faith Churches*, Don Posterski and Gary Nelson note that Canadians are reluctant to lead. They discovered in their research that being able to articulate a vision is an empowering force for the church. They invite leaders to listen to Browning and Armour's words:

1. Leaders must have a clear picture in their own minds where the church is going.
2. They must identify the key strategies that will move the church from where it is to where it needs to be.
3. That vision and those strategies must become internalized in each leader's heart. They should come to mind immediately and succinctly every time a leader faces a consequential decision or is asked about congregational plans.
4. Leaders must work tirelessly to find simple, clear-cut ways in which to explain this vision and the strategies that support it.
5. Leadership must communicate, communicate, communicate to the congregation.¹³⁰

The visionary leader can be identified by a number of characteristics. The leader is constantly open to learning, making new discoveries and

¹²⁹ George Barna, *Turning Vision Into Action* (Ventura: Regal Books), 135.

¹³⁰ Richard John Neuhaus, *Freedom for Ministry* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1979), 13.

exploring better ideas. The leader wants to get the task accomplished and is not concerned about who gets the credit. The visionary leader is not overcome by fear of failure but lives with a sense of optimism and expectation (Jn. 16:33). Such a leader builds on the past but tends to be future focused (Mt. 16:18). The visionary leader is able to embrace change and see in it possibilities for future development. He or she is able to make decisions and stick by them.¹³¹

One final point should be made on the place of leadership in the mission of the church. The visionary leader is called to have a missionary heart and to lead the church with passion. Van Engen comments:

The spiritual, emotional and mental personhood of their leaders provides the heart of the missionary congregations. Their managerial acumen provides the structure for missional outreach and the members provide the hands, feet, and spiritual gifts necessary to carry out the congregation's mission intentions.¹³²

The Bible provides a multitude of models of visionary leadership. Jesus was the most pronounced and celebrated of all visionaries (Heb. 12:2). He came into this world to accomplish his Father's redemptive plan and saw it through to completion. Paul was passed the torch of visionary leadership on the Damascus Road. The vision became the dynamic passion of his ministry years, leading people to the Saviour, building the church, and planting the vision for future leaders (Phil. 3:12-15a).

Helen Keller was once asked the question, "What would be worse than being born blind?" She is said to have replied, "To have sight without vision."¹³³ Vital to the church of today and tomorrow is visionary leadership.

¹³¹ Barna, 122.

¹³² Charles Van Engen, God's Missionary People (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1991), 166.

¹³³ John C. Maxwell, Developing the Leader Within You (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1993), 125.

d. Team Builder

A healthy church requires healthy leadership. Pastoral burnout becomes a reality when there is little or no cooperation between pastor and people in sharing the ministry of the local church. The leader works at building a team who can share the work. Moses was given wise advice by his father-in-law, Jethro, who challenged him to build a supportive team of helpers (Ex. 18:17-23). Building the team of judges made his load lighter and the God-directed task was accomplished with great speed and efficiency. Every church requires a leader who will serve as player-coach, giving the body guidance, motivation, example, and spiritual depth as the team reaches out in ministry.

George Barna reminds the church that:

A team mentality does not spontaneously arise within a church. A leader must instill a vision for team play among the players and create an environment in which those players work together toward a common end. That objective is to glorify God through acts of personal spiritual growth and community service.¹³⁴

There are a multitude of ways that the biblical concept of "body life" works out in the ministry of the local church. It is important to remember in team building that everyone is significant. Paul writes, "The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I don't need you!'" (1 Cor. 12:21). The Church of the Saviour, Washington, DC, recognizes the value of every member's giftedness with the motto, "On the ship of the church there are no passengers; all are members of the crew."¹³⁵ In planning the ministry of the church everyone has something important to bring to the table.

It is equally important to remember that God created people differently and gave them a variety of gifts (1 Cor. 12:7-11; Eph. 4:11-13; Rom. 12:6-8).

¹³⁴ Barna, 157.

¹³⁵ Maxie D. Dunham, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Philemon (Waco: Word Books, 1982), 202.

The team builder will become aware of the gifts of the congregation and work that into the strategy of ministry. Also, it is important for the team to realize the relationship of individual skills and abilities to the collective performance. The hockey goalie offers skills to benefit the performance of the whole team. The coach facilitates this awareness and desire within the team. Paul calls his workers to "try to excel in gifts that build up the church" (1Cor. 14:12b).

A cartoon has a cowboy standing alone in an open field with a gun on his hip. The caption is a read on his thinking "No wonder I'm lonesome. I keep shooting people."¹³⁶ A careful reading of the New Testament will remind Christians of the value of healthy relationships and how much they need each other. Gene A. Getz has written two books of sermons on the commonly used biblical phrase "one another". He speaks of the vital importance of this concept in New Testament times:

Frequently they used a unique word to describe this mutual and reciprocal process - the Greek word allelon, most frequently translated "one another". In fact, excluding the Gospels, the word is used 58 times in the New Testament.¹³⁷

A team building leader recognizes the part each player has in enriching the life and ministry of the community. Jesus demonstrated this "one another" support for ministry in the calling of the Twelve. He brought together people of diverse backgrounds and a variety of gifts to support one another in the Kingdom work. Although Jesus at times worked one on one, the directive to the Twelve, and later to the seventy-two was to go out and provide ministry two by two (Mk. 6:7; Lk. 10:1).

It was important in the culture of the day to have a witness to verify a story. "One witness is not enough to convict a man accused of any crime or

¹³⁶ M. Veller, *In Trust* (1997), 30.

¹³⁷ Gene A. Getz, Building Up One Another (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1976), 4.

offence he may have committed. A matter must be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses" (Deut. 19:15). John records Christ making this point of a valid witness to his Jewish listeners: "In your own Law it is written that the testimony of two men is valid. I am one who testifies for myself; my other witness is the one who sent me-the Father" (Jn. 8:17). Jesus wanted his followers to have a valid testimony as they travelled from town to town telling the Good News.

Further, Jesus sent them out in twos with the plan to provide each other with mutual support, encouragement, accountability and protection. Christian workers find their faith strengthened and their ability to serve enriched by the mutual support of others in ministry. Leaders help to select people who will work well together, enabling the diversity of gifts to enrich the team. Melvin J. Steinbron observes that team building is facilitated by having everyone share in the process of developing an idea or a program:

The lay people must have personal ownership of the ministry and ownership comes from facing the need and developing the ministry together. The lay people have to get in on the ground floor. What is designed by the professional clergy alone in the "ivory tower" is likely to fail.¹³⁸

When pastor and people serve together as a ministry team and focus their attention on meeting the opportunities of service, there is greater harmony in the church. Someone has said: "When everyone is busy pulling on the oars there is no time to rock the boat." Steinbron goes on to share what he discovered in his painful struggle to be a "team player":

As a pastor who used the "ivory tower" approach during most of my years of ministry, I had a difficult time adjusting to the process of working closely with lay people who had equal ownership of what we were doing. But I learned, stubbornly and slowly, from their wisdom and knowledge. And they learned

¹³⁸ Steinbron, 58.

from my idealism, spirit and theology. Together we forged a ministry design that we owned equally. What great respect I have for the practical approaches, creative ideas, openness to learning and the committed abilities of lay people. They needed me; I needed them. We needed each other.¹³⁹

Throughout this chapter a serious attempt has been made to establish the biblical foundation of visitation. As a result, the significance of visitation as a vital aspect of the church's life and ministry is confirmed by the biblical evidence. Beginning with the Exodus where God visited and delivered his people, through God's provisions during the exile and supremely in Christ, God has visited and redeemed his people. Again, Jesus modeled visitation in his life and mission.

This same Jesus calls men and women out of the world and transforms them into a Christ-centred fellowship (koinonia), who are sent out to proclaim the Word to the world (kerygma), and to serve those who are in need (diakonia).¹⁴⁰ The church is commissioned to incarnate God's grace and love in the world (Mt. 10:19-20). This is accomplished by prayerfully planning how to work and witness as the body of Christ in a lost and sinful world (Acts 6:1-7). The motivation is the message and modeling of the Christ who reveals God as one who embraces the lost son (Lk. 15:11 ff.), searches for the lost sheep (Lk. 15:3-7), and seeing the brokenness and pain of the world, seeks and sends his workers out into the harvest field (Mt. 9:35 ff.).

¹³⁹ Steinbron, 58.

¹⁴⁰ Jill M. Hudson, Evaluating Ministry, Principles and Processes for Clergy and Congregations (New York: Alban Institute Publication, 1992), 8.

Chapter Three

PROJECT COMPARED

This chapter looks at various models of visitation programs in both secular and religious settings. The writer has attempted to identify a variety of visitation programs that will serve to provide a comparison to the one that is being evaluated at First Baptist Church in Dartmouth. Much of the research in this chapter is based on personal interviews and materials acquired from churches and community service organizations.

A number of models for visitation have been identified throughout the church constituency in Canada. The research has been limited to Canadian Baptist Churches, plus a few models identified in a thesis by Robert L. Weatherby on *Disciple-Making In The Local Church*.¹⁴¹ Models from the medical support system were also included in this section, as well as an example from the field of social services. There are many similar principles at work in the ministry of visitation in the church and in the implementation of care by those who work in community medical and social service vocations. This phase of the study begins by presenting a comparative analysis of some of the visitation programs provided by the community service organizations in the city of Dartmouth and the province of Nova Scotia.

A. COMMUNITY SERVICE MODELS

i. Palliative Care Model

A workshop on palliative care being held in the city of Dartmouth used a handbook designed by the Cape Breton Regional Palliative Care Service. This resource covers a wide range of issues that a palliative care worker would face. The first section of the handbook is on spirituality and the second section

¹⁴¹ Robert L. Weatherby, *Disciple-Making In The Local Church*, M.Div. Thesis (Wolfville, N.S.: Acadia Divinity College, 1980).

on communication. The authors begin the handbook with an explanation of spirituality and how it may impact the life of a patient to be visited. The handbook provides a description of the setting for the visit and then gives some very helpful guidelines for the visitor. In a well-written document, they say:

Living with a final illness may bring a time of self-searching and self-assessment. Many things are changing in the dying person. As they move through their illness, it will be important for them to try to make sense of what is happening. This may challenge their beliefs and what has previously given meaning to their lives.¹⁴²

The worker or volunteer is guided through the process of helping the patient explore feelings, questions, and attitudes. The dying person may want to express thanks for the blessings of life, seek forgiveness for past offences, or simply explore some of the questions of life's meaning.

The home support worker is provided with clearly stated guidelines to assist in giving the needed care to a dying patient who may be exploring spiritual issues. These guidelines are worth noting:

- Be respectful of each person's individuality and particular beliefs, faith, and values.
- Stop, look, and listen. Do you have permission; does this person want to share with you in this area?
- Pay attention to the environment to give you information about what has been important to your client. Books, music, photos, diplomas, etc. will provide clues.
- Notice what behaviours, habits and rituals the client and family practice, such as holding hands, prayers at mealtimes, meditation, or quiet time.
- Check your perceptions and ideas with your client; encourage friends and

¹⁴² Volunteer Handbook, Cape Breton Regional Palliative Care Service (Sydney, N.S.: Cape Breton Regional Hospital, 1994).

family to be involved in care for the spirit. If you wish to assist with something or to make a suggestion, ask for permission to do so.

- Be creative.
- Good communication skills will be helpful in this area. Listen carefully. Be comfortable with sitting in silence.
- Be with the person wherever you are, knowing that you do not have to make it better. This may include companionship through feelings of aloneness, despair, or other difficult feelings.
- Refer any concerns, such as need for reconciliation or unfinished business to your supervisor for professional help.¹⁴³

The value of these training materials is in their respect for the individual. It is very client centred material. The information provides valuable insights in dealing with people in the closing days of their lives (e.g., dealing with silences, keeping your boundaries, openness to referrals, network of support, etc.)

The handbook has another section with a list of practical "how-to" suggestions to spend creative time with a dying person. It is a very supportive program that helps the worker to get in touch with the likes and dislikes of the patient's personal journey. Hopefully, the suggestions will remind the helper that the task is not overwhelming and that simple gifts of presence and caring for the patient will make the time redemptive.

Professional palliative care workers have special training in helping their clients to identify and express feelings. After a visit from a palliative care nurse to a dying parishioner, the writer found a woman who had come to grips with her feelings about dying. The woman was then able to talk freely about her feelings, and to understand that they were normal for someone in her

¹⁴³ Volunteer Handbook, Cape Breton.

physical condition and place in life. The nurse's visit became a watershed in the patient's communication with her pastor and members of her family. There was an added sense of peace to the process of living out her remaining time in this world.

ii. Psychiatric Care Model

The Nutritional Services department at the Nova Scotia Hospital provided some understanding of the psychiatric approach to home care.¹⁴⁴ While some people with psychiatric health needs are hospitalized, many live in the community and come to the hospital for evaluations and continuous support. There is a growing trend of psychiatric services making visits to the homes of their clients.

On a number of occasions the visit to a psychiatric patient would be made by more than one person because the patient may have been identified as having more than one need. An occupational therapist may be needed along with a nutritionist to provide the equipment for dieting. A nurse may be needed to provide some immediate health care. There may even be an occasion when the police are needed because a patient has not been taking medication and has created some conflict.

Workers who are being trained in patient care are taken on the first few home visits. In most cases the client is called and informed of the added visitor. In respect for the patient, permission is requested. If granted, the trainee accompanies the worker to the home and observes the dynamics of the visit. She is then asked to report the approach and to ask questions. After observing a number of visits the trainee then takes the lead with the trainer being the support person. The trainee, in the classroom, is also taught about safety,

¹⁴⁴ Judy Whalen, "Telephone and Personal Interviews" (Dartmouth, N.S., 1998).

confidentiality, assessment techniques, treatment measures, and skills in making the initial contact with a client (using substantial amounts of common sense), etc.

If the workers in nutritional care have never met the client it is very likely that they will take someone along on the first visit. Each worker is given a measure of training in safety procedures when dealing with people with serious psychiatric conditions. It is standard for trainees to study the Community Occupational Therapy Associates/ Toronto, Safety Guidelines. This provides lists of guidelines to help in a number of circumstances. For a home visit they suggest:

1. Know where the exits and doors are located. Make sure that both you and the client have an available exit.
2. Preferably select a hard chair to sit on. It is easier and quicker to get up from. Get your client seated as this has a calming affect.
3. Avoid the kitchen as it holds many makeshift weapons.
4. If you feel uncomfortable or threatened leave the premises immediately. Do not put yourself in danger. Do not antagonize or argue with the client.
5. When unsure of a situation in a home, review the case with your manager and plan a strategy.
6. If you are concerned, meet your client in a public place, e.g., a donut shop.
7. Do not ignore threatening behaviour.¹⁴⁵

The psychiatric worker may make a home visit for several reasons. There may be a need for an assessment of a patient. This may be needed for preventative care, or simply to provide continuing support for the client. There may even be an occasion when a worker needs to visit a home with the police to convince a client to take their proper medication. Most visits by psychiatric

¹⁴⁵ Safety Guidelines (Toronto: Community Therapy Associates, 1992), 4.

workers are to known clients. The visitor/visited relationship enables the task to be carried out in a careful and caring manner.

The psychiatric model of visitation brings out the need for a healthy respect for the client. The training provided for workers includes a considerable number of safety and security directives. These cautions may have a broader application in the light of the growth of crime, drugs, and family violence in our society. Also, the reference to visiting in pairs brings to the surface the concerns of assault accusations. Most volunteer organizations are required to screen their people with police checks to protect themselves (their church or organization) from endangering the people they serve.

iii. Home Care Nursing Model (VON)

This model of visitation was written up from interviews held with VON office personnel and a thirty year veteran supervisory nurse¹⁴⁶. The writer was able to make a study of the VON Canada Volunteer Handbook with special attention to their Volunteer Visiting Program. Some evaluation comments come from a recipient of VON home care in Nova Scotia.

VON workers are known for their skill in providing extraordinary care to people in their homes. The task of providing home care nursing can be very demanding and often discouraging. The worker may find people living in substandard circumstances with very little means of support. Sometimes the situation may border on abuse. The VON worker realizes that there are only limited resources to meet a need that appears to be overwhelming. The worker is faced with the care of the client and at sometimes the criticism of the family.

The circumstances at times may even prove to be dangerous to the caregiver. The VON worker is trained to avoid these circumstances and to seek

¹⁴⁶ Sandra Flemming and Judy Young, "Private Interviews" (Dartmouth, N.S., 1997, 1998).

immediate help at any signs of trouble. The nurse who is called out in the night shift carries a cell phone, a security whistle, and a beeper. Some areas of the city of Halifax, as happens in all major cities, are now out-of-bounds after dark.

On the other hand, this form of nursing care can be very rewarding as the practical needs of the patient are met. Expressions of relief and joy for care provided reward the efforts of the worker.

The VON worker for the most part is highly respected by the people served. The counsel of the VON worker is sought and followed. This brings a lot of responsibility for the emotional as well as the physical needs of the client. The shorter patient stay in the hospital has added considerable work to the home care nursing profession. Many of the VON clients are post discharge patients referred to them by the government agency, Home Care Nova Scotia. They provide two levels of care, registered nursing (RN) care at \$42 a visit or licensed practical nursing (LPN) care at \$33 a visit.

VON service most of their clients through personal home visits. However, they also visit seniors' institutions and even businesses to provide "Wellness Clinics". People are more pro-active about their health today and these clinics are provided to help people live a healthier lifestyle.

Another VON service is the "Foot Care Clinics" that take place in group homes and seniors' residences. These are subsidized and provide a service to the community. These are popular not only because of the practical health care provided but also the important social interaction. The lonely person from a group home is given 20-30 minutes of a nurse's time, one on one. It is an opportunity for such people to tell their story and to share their joys and struggles.

Not every nurse is suited to home care. The dynamics can be quite

different from hospital nursing. The control in the home visit shifts from the care-giver to the client. It is more of a partnership and the nurse is constantly negotiating the issues with the patient. However, in the home you really get to know the client. The environment reveals a lot about the person. The security of the home somehow brings down the walls and opens up the communication. There tends to be more honesty, more freedom to talk about real issues.

The VON worker finds time a pressure point. There is never enough time to respond to all the patient's needs. The nurse is constantly, throughout the day, evaluating how much time can be spent with each patient. The other pressure in the winter is getting in and out of the car, and climbing up and down stairs.

The worker learns skills that enable one to work alone. One finds, at times, that the actual health situation can be very demanding. However, the worker has a supervising nurse on call for assistance, and occasionally phones the doctor to get direction about a particular medical situation.

Questions about the client's support groups and religious affiliation are part of the assessment process. The spiritual interaction of a visiting nurse depends on the client and his or her openness to the subject. Also, it depends on the spiritual awareness and faith journey of the nurse. On occasion, some nurses may find it appropriate to pray with their clients.

VON nurses are involved in three days of in-service training when they begin their work. They are also given three days in the field where they are mentored by a more mature or experienced nurse. These visits that take an extra person to the home are negotiated with the client. Rarely are they refused in bringing a trainee to the home of a client.

The nurses whom the writer interviewed valued the work of home visitation very highly. The growing sense of isolation and loneliness in society

makes their services more and more important. The Halifax region of VON has recently employed a full-time volunteer coordinator to add a stronger support group to the work of their professional staff.

This "Volunteer Visiting Program" of VON offers volunteers an opportunity "to meet new people, to form new relationships, and to enhance the quality of life for members of the community."¹⁴⁷ The program targets primarily seniors, chronically ill, disabled, and those who are lonely or socially isolated. It enables friendships to develop through one-on-one visits over a regularly scheduled period of time. The volunteers provide a variety of care-giving services to the clients that include:

- social visiting in the home;
- outings: drives, shopping or a meal out;
- walks, cards, crafts or music; and
- visits to other friends or family.¹⁴⁸

Each volunteer is provided with a written job description and given appropriate orientation and training from a coordinator. The time commitment varies with the need of the client but may take 1-4 hours per week. The visitor is given instruction sheets with a variety of creative ideas on how to make the experience meaningful. Continuing support and assessment are also provided.

A family that received VON care over a period of time reported some of the strengths and weaknesses of the program.¹⁴⁹ They found the nurses cheerful, positive, and professional. The volunteers who came to the home were well prepared and provided excellent support. On the other hand, some of the nurses lacked training in caring for a palliative care patient. At times the nurse was patronizing toward the family, and unwilling to recognize family

¹⁴⁷ VON Canada Volunteer Handbook (1991), 24.

¹⁴⁸ VON, 24.

¹⁴⁹ Roger Cann, "Telephone Interview" (Wolfville, N.S., 1999).

members as the primary care givers. There was also some confusion in the initial stages of the process as to who was responsible for keeping the communication lines open. Negotiating with different offices of Home Care Nova Scotia and VON created some of the initial frustration. When the family took charge of the care, the assistance flowed more effectively. It would appear that this problem might be increased if the client has no family support.

The primary interview with a VON supervisor addressed the strengths and weaknesses of the program. The greatest concern was that some nurses find the transition from hospital and institutional nursing to home care nursing a difficult adjustment. However, the model of care-giving offered by VON nurses and their support services provide significant aid to many in the community and valuable insights for the study of visitation programs.

iv. Social Work Model

A visit to the library of the Atlantic Canada center for training social workers raised nothing specifically related to the subject of visitation. However, the librarian was able to direct the writer to agencies, which provide information and manuals on various aspects of visitation. Further, the writer has had a number of opportunities to visit with a trained social worker. The level of skill in listening and responding to emotional and practical needs of troubled people made the lessons learned from these visits of great value.

The writer received a phone call one Saturday afternoon from a funeral director asking for help in providing a funeral service for a man who had just died. The client was known by the social service workers, the writer, and by those who served in the food bank ministry of the church. The deceased man had a wife (separated but still good friends) who lived in a small room at a boarding house. A social worker from the church joined the writer in making a

visit to the bereaved lady.

The grieving woman was well acquainted with both of her visitors and therefore felt comfortable to invite them to her room. The writer sat on the only chair in the small room while the social worker sat alongside the woman on the bed. In a sensitive and skilful manner the social worker enabled the woman to share her feelings about what had happened and to talk about her relationship with the deceased husband. She initiated the grief process. Laughter and tears were shared and at the end of the visit the visitors felt the touch of God when the grieving wife, in a soft sweet voice, sang the old familiar hymn, Abide With Me.

The writer was reminded, in sharing this visit with a social worker to a former client in a pastoral setting, that it is important to recognize that the caregiving responsibility of the community is multi-professional. There is a growing openness within the social work profession to the spiritual needs of their clients. More and more social workers will assess the religious beliefs and support systems in the life of the client. This is part of the need to be more wholistic in serving people.

A further trend in the visitation pattern of social workers is the move from institutional care to home care.¹⁵⁰ There is a deliberate move from institutional based service to community-based service. There is also an emphasis on client-centred service. The client feels more comfortable and more in control in his or her own setting. There is also the issue of confidentiality that comes from seeing the worker in the privacy of the home rather than the public waiting room of a social service office building.

The social worker's visit is to respond to an expressed need. There may be a need for practical things like better housing. The need may be therapeutic,

¹⁵⁰ Carol Bethune, "Private Interview" (Dartmouth, N.S., 1998).

relational, or simply dealing with isolation. The social worker makes a home visit to assess the need. The goals are set through the combined evaluation of the worker and client together. There is an attempt to discover the resources of the person and to include them in the process of reaching a conclusion.

The social worker, during the visit, looks for the client's coping ability. Are the resources available to meet the client's needs (i.e., a telephone to handle emergencies)? The social worker observes their personal care. The environment and support system tells the worker how much extra assistance may be needed. Some people cope very well in spite of their lack of resources. At times, the social worker is overwhelmed by the resiliency of the human spirit.

A primary stress factor in social work visits is the inability to provide adequate service. The heavy caseload (130 clients with the worker who was interviewed) and shrinking dollars have changed the picture in recent years. Social services, like many government agencies, must learn to be creative and do more with less.

The work of social services, as mentioned before, is moving in the direction of being more client-based. At the same time, the worker focuses on the client's strengths rather than weaknesses. The thrust is to recognize and build upon their client's strengths. The worker is looking at what is important to the client rather than what is important to the agency.

Social workers depend on the strength of their supervisors and co-workers to support them in the heat of the battle. There is always the need to separate the personal life from the workplace. A strong and healthy self is better able to meet the challenges of being a care-giver in a broken society. Placing the priority on the family and home life allows the social worker the freedom to give the best care possible in the workplace.

The reward of home visiting is seeing an individual improve in his or her situation. Playing a small role in helping people integrate back into the community, or watching a family being reconciled, or facilitating the improvement of a person's health and personhood brings satisfaction to the task.

B. CHURCH AND RELIGIOUS MODELS

i. Bonavista Baptist Church – Calgary, Alberta

"Vis-a-care" is the name given to the visitation program at Bonavista Baptist Church in Calgary, Alberta.¹⁵¹ The growth of the church in a suburban Calgary community was overwhelming the pastoral staff. There was not enough time for the pastors to begin to meet the needs that were being identified. The deacons decided to initiate a ministry that would provide more effective spiritual care for the present congregation, and the growing number of newcomers.

A member of the congregation, with a passion for this ministry and training in pastoral care and palliative care, directs the ministry. The program developed in cooperation with the deacons and pastoral staff. The focus of the program is upon identified needs that "filter down" to the visitation committee from pastors, small groups, and people in the church.

The vision statement of the ministry is: "To reach out in love and care, meeting the needs of others to the best of our ability by personal visitation or personal phone calls." A stated goal of the program is "Disciplemaking by encouraging people into ministry."

The leadership of "vis-a-care" carefully selects workers from within the congregation who have a passion for people and a desire to serve. Not everyone is suited to the intimate task of visiting people in their private homes

¹⁵¹ Gerald Fisher, "Telephone Interview" (Calgary, AB., 1998).

and hospital rooms. Therefore, people are selected who possess attitudes and gifts that would enable them to perform this task effectively. They are then put through a period of instruction in pastoral care skills.

There is a mentoring aspect of the program. The director takes visitors with her on hospital and house calls and models the ministry. When she feels that these persons are comfortable, they are commissioned to go on their own and when prepared, take someone else with them. In this way the team of home visitors has developed.

The visitors seek to meet the spiritual and practical needs of the people they visit. They seek to help people through prayer and in practical ways using the resources of the congregation (i.e. nurses, lawyers, etc.) as well as making referrals to outside support.

There is a reporting system and a confidential file for each person visited that is placed in the computer system at the church for reference. This helps to monitor the visits (when and where) and therefore provide some continuity to the care provided by the church.

The development of listening skills is foremost in the training. The director of the program, who guides the training, says, "We are going to hear **their story**" [author's emphasis].¹⁵² Those visited are often lonely or have some special need. The church caller, often discovers that they are the only outside person to have made a visit to that home or hospital room for some time. The visitor goes in the name of the Bonavista Baptist Church and as a representative of Christ.

The director co-ordinates the weekly visits of the team. They do not visit everyone in the church but focus on "needs" that have been identified. The ministry comes under the leadership of the deacons and in co-operation with

¹⁵² Marilyn Howie, "Telephone Interview" (Calgary, AB., 1998).

the pastoral staff. It works in tandem with another ministry in the church called "tell-a-care". This is a "keep-in-touch" telephone visitation program.

Prayer is a vital part of the ministry. Visitors are encouraged to pray before they leave on a visit and also to pray for identified needs in the home or hospital when appropriate. The prayer base is a strength of this program. Also, the careful selection and mentoring of people who become involved in the program is a strength. A third item of note is the strong administration of the program, which includes reporting and monitoring of all aspects of the ministry.

While the visitation program has a clear vision statement and worthy goals, there seems to be no plan to provide ministry to the whole congregation. It would appear that valuable proactive visitation is missed in the "vis-a-care" program. Building relationships, discovering spiritual gifts, and providing preventative care comes from a visitation program that encompasses the whole congregation. It is one that reaches out to contacts and newcomers.

ii. West Hill Park Baptist Church – Regina, Saskatchewan

Rev. James Wells accepted a call to a Baptist church in Regina, Saskatchewan, where the discouraged congregation had dwindled to ninety members. The new pastor began a visitation ministry that included mentoring the laity. The visitation program was eventually supported by the formation of small groups (thirty in 1998), which provide mutual care and Bible teaching on a consistent basis. A third important element of this outreach ministry is having gifted and well trained greeters serving at the door in the worship services.

Four and a half years into the visitation program in Regina, the Evangelism Committee of the Baptist Union of Western Canada produced a

booklet on the ministry called, *Building a Visitation Program that Works*.¹⁵³

The pastor speaks to the impact of the program on his congregation in these words:

The program has been operative each Tuesday evening for over four and one-half years and has not only been integral in outreach to new people but also in creating a Christian community that has an extremely high degree of unity and commitment to a common goal, namely, renewal of the local church and converts added to Christ's Church.¹⁵⁴

The associate pastor of the Regina church (where the program is now into its eleventh year), shared with the writer about the important role of the greeters.¹⁵⁵ The greeters are very gifted people who are able to meet new people in the congregation and facilitate further contact. Visitors are invited to sign the guest books at each of the entrances to the sanctuary. Visits are established, and people are then placed in groups where they can find support and nurture. The church has seen remarkable growth in the past eleven years. It is now a congregation of over five hundred members and adherents with a multiple staff and a variety of ministries.

One of the key factors in this program is its priority in the total ministry of the church. The visitation night is listed in the schedule of activities of the church so that the congregation is fully aware of its importance. Actually, "no other meetings are permitted on that night."¹⁵⁶ The priority of this program is recognized through the involvement of pastoral staff and church leadership in the pastoral care of the congregation and continuing outreach through visitation every Tuesday night.

Wells makes some arguments for the visitation being unannounced.

¹⁵³ Wells, 1.

¹⁵⁴ Wells, 1.

¹⁵⁵ James Stelter, "Telephone Interview" (Regina, SK., 1998).

¹⁵⁶ Wells, 4.

While he is strong on organization and record keeping, he says "We have found that it is best not to phone first before going to visit."¹⁵⁷ He goes on to spell out the reasons when he writes:

In most cases, if the people are home, a good visit will occur. Telephoning first simply increases the number of cancellations for that night and complicates the entire program. We seldom have a poor reception at a door and the impromptu visit helps to decrease the tension some people may have with a pastoral or church visit.¹⁵⁸

The Regina church provides both mentoring and training for the visitors. It is not a high pressure approach to people but an attempt to "build bridges of friendship" with the new people who come to their church, and to provide a continuity of care for the whole congregation.

Wells believes it best to have the program coordinated by the senior pastor.¹⁵⁹ He feels that a lay person would not have the time required to maintain the program consistently because of career demands. While the associate staff need to be involved they would not have the same perspective as the senior pastor in caring for the whole church. The program demands a high degree of commitment but in the end brings great rewards because it works!

The strengths of this program are many. It has a vision for the pastoral care of the total congregation. Outreach and mission are seen as a priority by the church leadership. There is effective training for volunteers who make their gifts of ministry available. The welcome and integration of new people into the life of the congregation is worth noting.

Two weaknesses of the program (at least in some contexts) would be that the weight of the program is on the shoulders of the senior pastor and the failure to phone ahead to potential homes. Several pastors have expressed the

¹⁵⁷ Wells, 6.

¹⁵⁸ Wells, 6.

¹⁵⁹ Wells, 9.

importance of planning visits to prevent a waste of time and travel to homes where people are either not home or not ready to receive a visitor.

iii. First Baptist Church – Moncton, New Brunswick

The minister of youth and visitation, together with the leadership, has produced a lay visitation program for First Baptist Church called "Caring First".¹⁶⁰ The program has been developed around the theme of "family" and caring for one another within the community of the church. The minister of visitation, speaking about the older and newer members of the church, says "All of these members need to feel the importance of belonging, of being needed and loved by their family [the church]."¹⁶¹

The leadership of the church believes that "family" can become a reality through a well organized and well supported visitation program. Given high priority by the leadership and congregation, the visitation program will make a significant difference in the spiritual health and communal spirit of the members and adherents. The long term ambition of the program is that everyone will be visited and be given adequate pastoral care. However, they have begun the ministry by focusing on seniors and shut-ins.

The scriptural basis upon which they build the ministry is "encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing" (1 Thess. 5:11). The concept of "Caring First" is that teams of lay members will form visitation teams " for the purpose of systematic and regular visitation with shut-ins and senior members."¹⁶²

Each participant on the team is given a folder that explains the purpose and focus of the ministry. Included in the packet are: (1) a calendar of team

¹⁶⁰ John Ferguson, "Private Interview" (Moncton, N.B.: First Moncton United Baptist Church, 1998).

¹⁶¹ John Ferguson, "Caring First, Lay Visitation Program" (Moncton, N.B.: First Moncton United Baptist Church, 1998), 1.

¹⁶² Ferguson, 2.

meetings; (2) careful instructions on reporting; (3) team record forms which include visitor's lists - team leaders and team members; and (4) list of shut-ins and those in institutional care.

The program has been refined over the past four years to provide a better administrative base. Each year the efforts of the visiting teams are recognized by the church with a closing banquet and testimonial time. The careful administration, clear accountability, and celebration of the ministry are strengths of the "Caring First" visitation program.

The program, while it has expressed a broad based vision, is presently focused on a very small but significantly important segment of the congregation. The program would be strengthened by stronger ownership by the congregation, training workshops for visitors, and proactive visitation to new and younger families in the church.

iv. Forest Hills Baptist Church - Saint John, New Brunswick

"Care and Company Ministry" is the primary program of visitation in the Forest Hills Baptist Church.¹⁶³ The strength of this program is its diversity and inclusiveness. The heart of the program is the prayer ministry, which includes prayer chains, prayer partners, and corporate prayer. It serves, as a network for the prayer needs of the congregation and the church's mission. A second aspect of the program comes under the title "hospitality." The workers are involved in organized acts of kindness. They plan receptions after a funeral and do follow-up visits with the bereaved. They reach out to assist new mothers, coming alongside in practical ways to help. A third aspect of the visitation program is called "welcoming". The visitation team focuses its attention on new families coming into the life of the church. They look for

¹⁶³ Roger Graham and Allen Richardson, "Telephone Interviews" (Saint John, N.B., December, 1998).

practical ways that people can be assimilated into the life of the congregation.

There is a serious attempt to provide a proactive ministry alongside the reactive ministry. This has become part of the pastor's vision for developing a healthy church community. The pastoral staff's visitation in the past has been primarily reacting to crises (e.g., sickness, marriage failure, grief, etc.) They are making a concerted effort to visit families on a proactive (preventative care) basis.

The church also has had a dynamic youth program that includes visitation. The "Salt and Light Co." provided visitation (encouragement) to seniors by the youth of the church. It was also young people reaching out to other young people and their families. Presently, due to lack of leadership, the program is not functioning.

The deacons of Forest Hills Baptist are beginning to take greater responsibility for the pastoral care of the congregation. They are each given districts to serve where they are responsible for providing meals and serving communion to shut-ins and the elderly. However, from the deacons' perspective, most of the serious visitation (crisis, evangelism, etc.) is carried by the pastoral staff. The deacons' view this ministry of the staff as "a heavy load!"

The concept of "Care and Company" covers a broad spectrum of the caring ministry of the congregation. There is a vision for providing care for everyone whether "reactive" in response to a crisis or "proactive" in welcoming and building relationships with new people.

Forest Hills Baptist Church, for a number of years, used the Coral Ridge Presbyterian Church visitation program "Evangelism Explosion" as their primary tool of evangelism. The pastor took the training in Florida and became the trainer for others in the church. This program centers on home visitation to

reach the community for Christ. A number of remarkable conversions were the result of this outreach to new families. The program was suspended after the pastor became ill and a number of key families who provided leadership moved away.

The constant movement of leadership seems to be a major factor in the inability of churches (including Forest Hills) to sustain some visitation programs (e.g., the Evangelism Explosion model). However, the "Care and Company" program continues to provide a broad base of pastoral care for the people. It has the full support of both the pastoral and lay leadership. There appears to be an opportunity here for more training specifically designed to assist the laity in the visitation aspect of the church's ministry. Most of the training to date has been in the area of deacon preparation.

v. North Brookfield United Baptist Church - Nova Scotia

The North Brookfield pastorate serves several rural communities in south-central Nova Scotia. The congregations consist of an aging population and they expect the pastor to visit often. The pastor places visitation at the top of his pastoral responsibilities because of the nature of the area and personal ministry focus. Hospital visitation and care of the sick are viewed as his number one priority. The pastor finds that visitation keeps the communication open and the spirit of the ministry in the community alive. He says, "it greases the wheel in the organization."¹⁶⁴ It is the primary way that he can keep in close touch with his people.

It is the pastor's belief that evangelism flows from consistent visitation. The pastor becomes acquainted with the extended family and friends who drop by when he is making a visit in one of the communities. These people become

¹⁶⁴ Hank Dixon, "Telephone Interview" (North Brookfield, N.S., December, 1998).

potential prospects for a gospel presentation. The pastor, through home visitation builds bridges over which the message of Christ can be communicated.

The counselling work of the large rural pastorate is very demanding at times. With fewer care-giving resources available, people look to the pastor for leadership and support. The aging population has brought extensive grief work (fifty-seven funerals in five years). Sexual and physical abuse issues have surfaced in his visits to the homes of these isolated communities.

The pastor believes that life experience is a great teacher/equiper in the ministry of pastoral care. He has a personal counsellor and ministerial prayer group that provides him with the support he needs for this emotionally and spiritually challenging area of pastoral care.

The pastor shared an example of how visitation helped him to connect with his congregation. During his first winter in the area there was a large ice storm and in the evening he drove out to make a brief visit to two elderly people who were living alone. He wanted to make sure they were safe in the midst of the storm. They were very surprised to see him and the word quickly spread through the community about his pastoral concern.

Again, the weakness in this program of visitation would be its lack of congregational ownership. The visitation in these rural churches depends entirely on the work and witness of the pastor. Very little visitation by the members of the congregation happens except for informal contacts within families and in community life. The vision of the present pastor to equip the laity to serve as pastoral visitors, if owned by the people, could move the pastoral care program of the congregation a long way towards sustainability.

vi. Second Chipman United Baptist Church - New Brunswick

The visitation program at the semi-rural church in Chipman, New Brunswick is called "The Shepherd's Staff". The need for visitation became evident when the pastor was injured and there was no one providing pastoral care for the people. The deacons, with the cooperation of the pastor, organized a program with five teams, placing a deacon on each team. These teams of three to four members are on duty to provide pastoral care for the congregation every fifth week.¹⁶⁵

A gifted administrator in the congregation coordinates the program of visitation. She values the program and the impact it has had in the life of the church, but does not see herself as a competent visitor. In referring to the effectiveness of the program, she sees that some teams are more capable than others.¹⁶⁶

The team on duty is passed a schedule of visits for the week by the coordinator. They pass in a report at the end of the week of visits completed. The church buys cards for celebration and sickness. "The Shepherd's Staff" members buy the stamps and send the cards to remember birthdays, anniversaries, and those who are recovering from sickness at home or in hospital.

There have been no specific training opportunities. Some people find the task difficult, especially when people reject their offer for a visit. Some will only do hospital visits. At the end of the year they have an appreciation night in which their work is recognized. They have a meal together and share the experiences of their involvement in the ministry.

One of the side benefits of "The Shepherd's Staff" program is the strengthening of the Christmas "cheer" boxes. They have looked at the ageing

¹⁶⁵ Donald Burke, "Telephone Interview" (Chipman, N.B., November 1998).

¹⁶⁶ June Chase, "Telephone Interview" (Chipman, N.B., November 1998).

(over 80) and the sick, as well as those in special need and have a list of 40 families in the community that they can visit with Christmas assistance. Cards have been purchased and are sent in the name of the church. This will be their second year of offering this special help at Christmas. This is one example of how the visitation program impacts the wider ministry of the church. It is also a signal that "The Shepherd's Staff" is a well managed and directed program.

The program recognizes the limits of people's giftedness and attempts to fit the program to the resources available. "The Shepherd's Staff", run by sensitive and sensible leadership, seeks to make sure that all those involved know their responsibilities and have a good experience in this visitation ministry. A positive aspect of this program is the appreciation night when people are affirmed in their ministry.

It is the writer's belief that some well-planned training events would move the program to a higher level of service. Recognition of the meaning of "spiritual giftedness" could be an aspect of the training, affirming those who identify and exercise their gifts in ministry and releasing others from the guilt of not being able to do everything. Also, training on how to handle conflict and rejection would strengthen the team and its resolve to serve.

vii. Bromley Road Baptist Church – Ottawa, Ontario

The "Pastoral Care Group" is the primary visitation team providing pastoral care to this urban congregation. They work in concert with the pastoral team. This program, with a history of over twenty years, is one of the longest surviving programs the writer has been able to identify. It has survived for several reasons, including: (1) pastoral support; (2) the commitment of capable people; (3) adequate training; (4) regular maintenance; and (5) accountability.

A member of the original team that came together to begin the ministry

in the Ottawa church felt that the "Pastoral Care Group" ministry has made a profound impact on her life.¹⁶⁷ The training component was particularly effective and consists of an eight- week commitment in an interchurch setting. The training workshop required that the church send eight workers and (at least) one pastor. Excellent training was provided on issues such as: (1) early adolescence; (2) changing needs of the elderly; and (3) use of Scripture and prayer in visitation.

The monthly meetings of the "Pastoral Care Group" became a support group for the visitors.¹⁶⁸ They could share their struggles, their questions, their victories, and the joy of serving Christ, his people, and his church. They would identify needs and reassign visitors. They visited the recently bereaved, the sick, new mothers, new families, and special needs.

The pastoral staff are very supportive of the "Pastoral Care Group" that meets monthly to review their ministry and plan for future visits. The church will add a part-time minister of visitation to the pastoral team in the coming year, recognizing the growing demands of care-giving in chaotic times. The church is placing more of its resources in pastoral care, an area of the church's life that it sees as a priority.

Again, the strength of this program has been its strong leadership, pastoral support, and congregational ownership. The training component has been noteworthy as well. The constant change of personnel in a mobile society has kept the program from developing more strength through the years.

viii. Greenwood Drive Baptist Church – Fredericton, N.B.

The visitation program, called "Undershepherd Ministry," is a combined ministry of the deacons' board and a group called "Willing Hands" at

¹⁶⁷ Dora Crosby, "Telephone Interview" (Wolfville, N.S., November 1998).

¹⁶⁸ Gerald Cooke, "Telephone Interview" (Ottawa, ON., December 1998).

Greenwood Drive Baptist Church.¹⁶⁹ The responsibility of a deacon, according to the church constitution, includes "assisting in the spiritual care and visitation of church members."¹⁷⁰ The "Willing Hands" established their vision statement in 1997 to include "[the] set up of a visitation committee whereby [they] wish to work closely with pastor and deacons' board to visit sick and shut-ins, make telephone calls when appropriate, and outreach not only to our church people but in the areas surrounding our church."¹⁷¹

The strength of this program is in the clearly defined purpose of the ministry and roles of the participants. The goals are set out in these words:

- 1) That everyone in our church family will be prayed for regularly by at least one other person in the church family;
- 2) That everyone in the church family will be visited and ministered to especially when a need arises, such as sickness or death in the family; and
- 3) That no one will be neglected or overlooked, and all will receive the pastoral care they need.¹⁷²

The objectives of the program are very thorough and quite ambitious. The church membership (approximately 200) has a large base of lay leadership that can make the program work. The key to the success of the program will be the appointment of skilled coordinators who can give the time commitment needed to accomplish the task. The program will also need the full support of the pastoral staff.

The document that outlines the "Undershepherd Ministry" program defines clearly the specific tasks of visitors, staff, and co-ordinators. It is open to development and change as the ministry grows. The place of mutual accountability and support is clearly spelled out in the manual of the ministry.

¹⁶⁹ Anita Jones. "Telephone Interview" (Fredericton, N.B., December 1998).

¹⁷⁰ Constitution of Greenwood Drive United Baptist Church, Fredericton, N.B., 1991, 4.

¹⁷¹ Vision Statement of "Willing Hands" service group from Greenwood Drive United Baptist Church, Fredericton, N.B., 1997.

¹⁷² Vision Statement.

Prayer is a strong foundational basis of each step in the program's development.

ix. Coral Ridge Presbyterian Church - Florida

"Evangelism Explosion" is the name that identifies the evangelistic visitation program of the Coral Ridge Presbyterian Church in Florida. The program of evangelistic visitation and discipleship continues to be a motivating factor of this church's enduring growth. Rob Weatherby, in his Master of Divinity thesis, shares how this model of visitation evangelism and follow-up has had world-wide impact.

This program began with the pastor, Dr. James Kennedy, training his laity and taking them out into the community. People who attended his church were registered and given a follow-up home visit. The laity were trained by Dr. Kennedy and his staff to share their faith through a gospel presentation in the context of the home. The church grew through these contacts and conversions to Christ.

The Coral Ridge Presbyterian Church put in place a careful administrative structure to train leaders and provide a system of integration of new believers into the life and ministry of the church. There was a continuing recruitment of evangelists to carry the ministry forward. Their church-integrated follow-up procedure follows this basic outline:

- (1) the new convert is visited several times by a "spiritual parent" who establishes him in the Scriptures and assures him of his salvation;
- (2) the individual is encouraged to join a small Bible study group in which the basics of the Christian faith are studied and applied;
- (3) after church membership, a "sponsor" is assigned to the young Christian for personal teaching and encouragement;
- (4) the new member is assigned to an "Undershepherd Group" consisting of eight neighbourhood families and led by a mature

Christian couple in the church;

(5) he is encouraged to attend a "New Members" Sunday School class for 8-10 weeks;

(6) he is invited to join the evangelism program as a trainee;

(7) after training, he is encouraged to train others; and

(8) finally, he is personally trained how to follow-up and disciple the "fruit" of his evangelism.¹⁷³

This system of calling, equipping, and commissioning workers is worthy of note. The program of visitation evangelism worked so well in the local church in Florida that it was marketed world-wide. The strength of the program was its evangelistic focus and training and mentoring component. People who were shy about sharing their faith were invited to accompany someone as an observer in the beginning. Gradually, at a pace they could handle, they moved from observer to presenter. The evangelistic presentation in the program was simple to follow and was proven to be effective in many homes around the world.

Some churches in Canada found the adaptation of the program to their cultural context difficult. It was seen as too aggressive in the presentation of the gospel. Some cultures call for a longer period of "bridge-building" before people are open to share at that level of their spiritual life. The program calls for a certain level of commitment by the church in the area of training and financial support that many are not willing to accept.

x. Sora Tribe - India

Rob Weatherby uses the wonderful story of the Sora tribe of India as an illustration of effective discipling. In his paper Weatherby writes:

The goal of Canadian Baptist missionaries among the primitive Sora tribe was to teach and train the native people to do the "work of ministry" themselves. Pastoral and financial independence, and not dependence, was the long-term goal. This

¹⁷³ Weatherby, 93.

strategy has proven very successful.¹⁷⁴

Beginning in the early 1950's, Rev. Perry Allaby began a "simple, non-institutional system of leadership instruction." Each week, Allaby met with two groups of Sora lay leaders to help them study a Bible lesson and develop their pastoral skills. After the weekly sessions, the lay leaders would return to their various villages and share what they had learned with their fellow-believers.¹⁷⁵

During the bicentenary of William Carey's arrival in India, in 1992, the writer visited these tribal people and experienced personally this fast growing and spiritually rich Christian community. Thirty thousand Sora believers had gathered in a field for the dedication of the Bible in their own language. Some of the missionaries, including Perry and Edith Allaby, who had started the discipleship program were there to witness the miracle of God's grace and the fruit of their years of labour. The writer's experience of sharing in the work and witness of the Sora believers in 1992 was both heart-warming and life-changing. Grounded in the Word of God, led by the Holy Spirit, these rural mountain people had grown into a dynamic Christian community of 100,000 believers.

The principle found in Paul's letter to Timothy, "And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others" (2 Tim. 2:2) has found rich soil among these former animistic people.

The culture dictates that visitation occurs in community, as extended tribal families gather in homes or meeting places to share their victories and struggles, their joys and sorrows. The power of lay leadership, ownership of pastoral care by the people, one on one mentoring, and solid Bible based training are valuable lessons others can learn from the Christian believers of

¹⁷⁴ Weatherby, 97-98.

¹⁷⁵ Weatherby, 101-102.

the Sora tribes in India.

xi. Jehovah's Witnesses - Worldwide

This religious group provides their followers with a distorted and deceptive theology but they efficiently employ a biblical strategy of outreach and discipling. Weatherby gives an outline of their strategy:

- (1) the convert is contacted and given literature by means of door-to-door visitation;
- (2) he is followed up with house calls and invited to a small group "Bible" study where Jehovah's Witness doctrine is taught;
- (3) he is also invited to attend the "Service meeting";
- (4) high standards of attendance and preparation are expected if the convert is to continue; and
- (5) after thorough doctrinal training in the book studies, services and the "Theocratic Ministry" school, he is gradually exposed to, and trained in, door-to-door visitation.¹⁷⁶

These lines point to a completed cycle of discipleship training. The convert who was reached through visitation is now out on the street actively involved in visiting others. While Christians do not accept their motivation (essentially, salvation by works) or some of their techniques (legalistic obedience, indoctrination, etc.), nevertheless, there is much that can be learned from their overall discipling strategy.

Jehovah's Witnesses exhibit hard work, consistent commitment to the task, awareness of the lostness of society as they engage in ongoing training in the classroom and in the field of service. They use literature effectively and involve people from all age groups in their door-to-door visitation. Their outreach is to all segments of society.

Jehovah's Witnesses are now the third largest religious group in France (after Catholic and Moslem) with over 220,000 followers.¹⁷⁷ They are a

¹⁷⁶ Weatherby, 103-104.

¹⁷⁷ News Report, (France, 1998).

growing force in parts of the world where they have the freedom to visit and share their story. Again, one may not totally agree with their message or their method, but we can learn from their commitment to the cause of reaching converts through home visitation.

C. OBSERVATIONS

There are a number of observations that flow from the different models of visitation in the church and community. These items can impact the development of an effective visitation program in the local church.

- 1) The community service visitor is challenged by the shift of control that happens when care is moved from the institutional setting to the private home. The worker must negotiate with the client in the decisions related to the care-giving.
- 2) There is more openness to sharing the issues of life in the home. The care-giver learns a lot about the client in the environment of the home. Often the client is more secure and has more privacy to talk about the things that matter most.
- 3) Community service visitors are very aware of the dangers of home visits and are trained to protect themselves. The issues of security need to be recognized by all community and church care-givers. The biblical principle of visiting in twos takes on fresh meaning in our age of crime and abuse.
- 4) Many of the principles of effective home visitation are shared by both church and community workers. It is important for church leaders to recognize that many in the congregation may be well trained and have unique gifts for home visitation.
- 5) There is a new emphasis by medical and social service professionals to provide "holistic" care, which includes the spiritual dimension of the client. This impacts the church in terms of seeing ministry as part of a team of care-givers.
- 6) Ownership of the visitation program by the whole church makes a big difference in its effectiveness. The program will not be sustained without the full support of the pastor and the congregation.

- 7) There is the need to place before the people a vision for total pastoral care of the congregation. Putting the "big picture" in perspective, the program begins to build one step at a time.
- 8) The hesitancy to visit needs to be addressed with effective training. There is a huge gap between the recognition of need for a visitation ministry and the ability to meet that need. Education, equipping, mentoring, modelling will help to narrow the gap.
- 9) The congregation needs to be taught the importance of lay ministry. There is a need for a major paradigm shift in the belief system of many Christians today. The mounting demands on the pastor's time are forcing the membership of churches to view the "priesthood of all believers" as a valid theological reality in our time.
- 10) Several of the church models point to the vital contribution of a lay leader who has both pastoral and administrative gifts.
- 11) The models of ministry that are having success point to the importance of developing healthy systems that welcome and integrate new people.
- 12) Awareness of the culture will impact the program of visitation. The busyness of people limits their participation in programs. However, the heart felt longing for meaning and the desire for community both provide motivation to involve church people in a program of visitation.

Chapter Four

PROJECT DESIGNED

The pile of papers on the corner of the writer's desk was an ongoing reminder of the need for a better plan of pastoral care. The slips of paper represented the continuing flow of pastoral opportunities. One piece of paper reported a phone call from a pastor in another city who shared his concern for a family that had moved to Dartmouth and were in need of pastoral care. Some were names of contacts from a conversation at a wedding banquet - people inquiring about a church they might attend. A pastoral reminder of a family who were struggling with grief was noted on a slip of paper after a conversation with a church member at the door on Sunday morning. The administrative and pastoral challenge was to establish a visitation program that could respond more quickly and efficiently to the growing pile of reminders to the pastors and leaders that there were many opportunities for ministry (Rev. 3:7).

The goal of the church was to build a visitation program that would provide a reliable and sustainable ministry of pastoral care to its membership. There was also a need to have an effective outreach to the city. Recognizing the capable resources within the laity began a more intentional process of including their participation in this ministry. Reviewing the goals set out in the introduction of this thesis, there was from the beginning a desire to: (1) raise an awareness within the congregation of the importance of visitation to the health and growth of the church; (2) develop an understanding and a supportive attitude within the church for lay participation in pastoral care; (3) discover within the membership of the church those who were gifted and willing to serve as visitors; (4) provide adequate training for those who volunteer to serve through seminars, conferences, workshops, reading material, and an on-the-job

mentoring process; (5) put in place the administrative base that would sustain the program as it continued to develop; and (6) develop a system of evaluation that would help the church to monitor the effectiveness of the program over time.

The awareness of a changing culture and its impact on the spiritual trends of Canadians moved the church to make a number of changes in leadership, program, and direction of ministry. The steady downward trend of church attendance within the mainline churches provided a further reason for First Baptist Church, Dartmouth, to take a serious review of its mission strategy.¹⁷⁸ Reginald Bibby writing about his research of church life in Canada reminded the pastoral staff and church leadership that people are not looking for churches nor are churches looking for people.¹⁷⁹ However, against that reality is the discovery that many Canadians are looking for the things that the Christian church can address, which includes an understanding of mystery, a longing for meaning and a desire to belong. Bibby says, "Organized religion may be in trouble; but large numbers of Canadians who are not highly involved in the churches show a remarkable openness to the supernatural and to spirituality."¹⁸⁰

This chapter looks closely at the preparation of the people, the visitation plan that was developed and implemented at First Baptist Church in Dartmouth and the appraisal tools that were applied to keep track of the ministry.

A. PREPARATION

The pastoral staff with the full support of the deacons and church leadership engaged in a period of preparing the people of First Baptist for a

¹⁷⁸ Bibby, 15-17.

¹⁷⁹ Bibby, 29-35.

¹⁸⁰ Bibby, 28.

ministry that would embrace the laity in all aspects of its life. This was not a new concept or value to be welcomed by the congregation. The history of the church reveals that a vital laity led outreach to neighbourhood children. In its early beginnings they built the Sunday school and eventually brought new people and new life to the congregation. However, with the changing times, work pressure on pastoral staff, and continuous growth in the congregation, there developed a need to address the important place of the laity in the task of care-giving and outreach to the community. Listed here are seven different ways the leadership communicated this message to the congregation.

i. Vision Statement

Equipping was put at the centre of the First Baptist Church's vision of ministry. The weekly bulletin carries on the front cover the Scripture passage "Equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen." (Heb. 13:21 NIV). The church logo is: "Over 150 Years of **Equipping**. Heb.13:21." This bulletin design attempted to capture the essential quality of the church's focus of ministry at this point in its history. A study by an outside consultant revealed that equipping the laity was an important emphasis of First Baptist Church and a value that vibrated at the heart of its life and mission.¹⁸¹ This has worked itself into the planning of multiple "in house" and "outreach" ministries that were developed out of identified spiritual needs within the church and community. The multiple programs of the church attracted people who felt their needs were being met and who in time provided leadership for others. However, the church was continually searching for gifted and available laity to provide leadership that could meet the growing demands

¹⁸¹ Mark MacDonald, (Moncton, N.B.: Hawke Communications, 1997).

of various ministries. The process, as described in the rest of this chapter includes recruitment, training and deployment of personnel. Visitation has been, and continues to be, an integral part of the mission plan and program development of the church.

Consistently through the years, the subject of visitation and pastoral care has been kept before the congregation. The summation of the church's vision presented at the church's Annual Meeting in 1997 mirrored the values, the activity, and the ministries of the church. It can be noted that "**pastoral care**" and "**equipping laity**" are at the heart of the vision statement (author's emphasis).

FIRST BAPTIST, DARTMOUTH - VISION 97

1) Communicating Abundant Life Through Christ:

- through joyful Christ-centered worship
- through relevant Biblical preaching
- through modelling authentic Christian lifestyles

2) Providing Effective Pastoral Care For The Church Family:

- through consistent visitation/ tel-e-care
- through H.O.M.E. groups (Homes Open to Ministry and Evangelism) and Bible studies
- through pastoral counselling
- through hospitality/ social interaction
- through effective communication/ church & community

3) Equipping Laity For Significant Service:

- through Sunday school/ adult electives
- through midweek programs for all ages
- through mentoring/ service opportunities
- through Christian Life Classes
- through summer ministries of outreach

4) Providing Compassionate Ministry To The Marginalized:

- through Food Bank/ F.O.O.D. (Feeding Others of Dartmouth)/ Hope Cottage
- through S.A.S.A.(Singles and Single Again)

- through Big A+/ Summer Fun (two programs for inner city children)
- through Prison ministry
- through Transitions/ assisting people through change

5) Bringing God's Global Mission Into The Heart Of The Church:

- through mission education
- through interaction with missionaries/ mission projects
- through mission tours/ travel overseas

This vision statement was a summation of the ministry focus of the church. It reflected the development of worship and witness that involved the equipping and deployment of laity, both in the church and in the community. The statement looked back on some the church's significant history of providing care for its people and projected the desire to continue to move the mission outward into a broken world. Many of the ministries identified in the vision statement require constant visitation and involvement with people outside the membership of the church.

ii. Deacons' Meetings

The leadership of First Baptist Church has always valued visitation. The deacons' board meetings often included discussion of and prayer for the pastoral concerns of the church. The deacons were actively involved in visitation to new members, crisis situations, serving communion, communicating the spiritual direction of the church, and the selection of people for leadership positions. Pastoral care of the congregation and outreach to new families were often on the agenda at deacons' retreats and conferences.

Every new endeavour to develop and implement the program of visitation was passed through the evaluation of the deacons' board. Not all deacons saw visitation as their particular spiritual gift, but all were in support of the ministry. Many of these men and women offered their time and

assistance in this important aspect of ministry. The board was very supportive of seeking outside help in developing the ministry of the laity and the program of visitation. However, as has been mentioned before, not every deacon had the same level of desire to be personally involved in the program. Part of this reluctance was addressed through education, training, mentoring and participation.

iii. Leadership Workshops

Three of the workshops, initiated by the leadership, engaged qualified outside support people to assist in leading the church forward in the development of the ministry of the laity and the ministry of visitation.

a. Unleashing the Church

This workshop was hosted by First Baptist Church and attracted well over a hundred participants from many churches in the city and from other areas in Nova Scotia. Frank Tillapaugh, the seminar leader, had developed a dynamic church in Denver, Colorado, that became internationally known through the publishing of his book, *Unleashing The Church*. In the foreword to the book, Vernon C. Grounds, outlines the thrust of Tillapaugh's message:

His message, therefore, is clear and simple: unleash the church! Forget about bringing people in. Focus on getting God's people out where there are sin and pain and need. Forget about institutional success. Focus on out group service. Forget about binding members to an organization with ties of loyalty, cords of convivial programming, and busy intramural involvement. Focus on unshackling members, motivating them to give time and energy beyond any ecclesiastical ghetto. Forget about growth as an end in itself. And, paradoxically, growth will take place as the by-product of a ministry which refused to be self-centered and self-serving.¹⁸²

¹⁸² Frank R. Tillapaugh, *Unleashing The Church* (Ventura: Regal Books, 1982), 5-6.

The leadership at First Baptist Church was making a concerted effort to involve the laity in every aspect of the church's ministry. The impact of the Tillapaugh seminar was to heighten the excitement that comes to a church that releases its membership into ministry. A close look at the structure of this church, with its council and committees, pointed to a focus on maintenance.¹⁸³ Tillapaugh's model reduced the committee structure and developed a plan that put people "out" into the mission of the church.¹⁸⁴

b. Employing Spiritual Gifts

Dr. Brian Harpell, a pastor in the American Baptist Convention, has been successful in helping churches discover the wealth of untapped resources in the "spiritual gifts" of their people. His workshop provided a fresh look at the variety of spiritual gifts within the body of Christ. During the workshop one competent young leader said, "I feel set free by his teaching. I don't have to carry the guilt of not being able to do some ministries well. I'm set free to concentrate on the places where God has uniquely gifted me."

Again, a large number of the church's leadership participated in the workshop. There were a number of people who found this teaching helpful in deciding where to invest their time in the ministry of the church. One deacon rejected the nomination to the office of chairman. She realized that her gifts were in other areas, namely, speaking and writing. The church has watched with delight as those identified "spiritual gifts" have been developed and effectively used over time. Dr. Harpell helped the church to look at a deeper spiritual level when selecting people to lead. He defined spiritual gifts in these words, "Spiritual gifts are the special abilities that God gives through his spirit

¹⁸³ Ezra E. Jones and Robert L. Wilson. What's Ahead For Old First Church (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1974), 102.

¹⁸⁴ Tillapaugh, 129.

to every member of the body of Christ according to God's grace for the benefit of the body."¹⁸⁵

c. The Ministry of Listening

During the development period of the visitation ministry at First Baptist Church, Dr. Donald Peel was invited to present a workshop on visitation in Halifax. Several of the leadership team and those involved in visitation attended. The sessions elaborated on the content of his resourceful book, *The Ministry of Listening*.¹⁸⁶

The book has become a classic in the ministry of visitation. Many of our churches across the country use it as a training tool for their visitation programs. In the book, Peel points to the powerful tools for caring that are provided by the Christian message and Christian messenger. He is particularly good in applying the "art of creative listening." His book has motivational as well as practical value. He writes in his preface:

But it is the sick in hospital who have an abundance of time to think and are often happy to have someone to talk to, someone who will try to understand them, accept them, and minister to them "where they are". They need listeners with an accurate feel for what they consciously or unconsciously are groping for listeners equipped by Christian conviction, training, and experience to minister to them in very delicate, sometimes even rather public, circumstances. These are vulnerable, hurting fellow humans. They need what the church has to offer. But the Christian visitor has to know how to share in such a way that the other can receive his or her gift with integrity.¹⁸⁷

The Peel model reflects his background as a hospital chaplain but the principles set forth in the workshop could be applied to all phases of pastoral

¹⁸⁵ Brian H. Harpell, *Employing Spiritual Gifts For Church Growth* (Ashland: Ashland Theological Seminary, 1982), 14.

¹⁸⁶ Donald Peel, *The Ministry of Listening* (Toronto: The Anglican Book Store, 1980).

¹⁸⁷ Peel, 10.

care and visitation, both in home and hospital. These workshops supplemented the preaching and teaching ministry of the church on the subject of care-giving.

iv. Preaching on Visitation

Living and working in the very broken community of the poor and the marginalized, the pastoral staff was constantly made aware of the need of "healthy relationships" in the home and in the church . This theme has strong biblical roots in the Old Testament concept of the community, "God's chosen people."¹⁸⁸ The New Testament reveals the Christ as one who works alongside the company of the Twelve and builds these disciples into a healthy community of servant leaders who become the foundation of the church, "the family of God."¹⁸⁹ This basic need to be in community, to have trusted relationships is timeless. A Gallup poll taken in August, 1991, identified six basic spiritual needs in America as:

- (1) the need to believe that life is meaningful and has a purpose;
- (2) the need for a sense of community and deeper relationships;
- (3) the need to be appreciated and respected;
- (4) the need to be listened to- to be heard;
- (5) the need to feel that one is growing in faith;
- (6) the need for practical help in developing a mature faith.¹⁹⁰

These spiritual aspirations were being addressed from the pulpit. The need was not only to find relationships and community, but also to be involved in the "doing", the building of community. Two sermon series that were

¹⁸⁸ Eph. 1:4.

¹⁸⁹ 2 Cor. 6:18.

¹⁹⁰ Robert L. Randall, What People Expect From Church (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1992), 22.

preached by the staff during the developmental stage of the visitation program was a series on "The Homes Jesus Visited" and a series on "Ministry of Mutual Support".

The sermon series, "The Homes Jesus Visited", was preached during August and September, 1994. These sermons looked closely at the model of home visitation that Jesus authenticated in his own ministry. A number of questions were addressed: Who resided in the homes that he visited? Why did he enter these homes? What was accomplished by his visit? How can these events impact our life and ministry?

Luke records the visit of Jesus to the home of the sisters, Mary and Martha.¹⁹¹ The story points to the rewards of friendship; the gift of hospitality; the importance of living a balanced life; and the discovery of life's priority. Jesus demonstrates here that a home visit can strengthen friendships and enrich faith.

Another sermon from the series centered on the visit of Jesus to the home of Zacchaeus,¹⁹² the outcast tax collector of Jericho. This visit highlights the significance of a concerned Christian calling on the home of an unbeliever. His work and status within the community would make it appear that he was the least likely to respond to the Gospel.

However, the story demonstrates the yearning of the human heart for truth and grace. It demonstrates the power of Jesus Christ to transform. Luke records these powerful words of a man who has found a new life, "Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount" (Lk. 19:8).

This sermon was meant to challenge the congregation to move outside its comfort zone in visitation and meeting people. Church visitors are often

¹⁹¹ Lk. 10:38-42.

¹⁹² Lk. 19:1-10.

surprised by the spiritual interest of people outside the circle of their church community. The writer identified with the discovery of pastor Mark Lauterbach, when he said, "To my surprise I found non-religious people remarkably open, even hungry, for friendship. Some were curious about who God is and welcomed my presence."¹⁹³

Another home visit explored was the invitation by the Emmaus travellers.¹⁹⁴ These men opened their home to a fellow traveller and in the process encountered God and had their faith renewed. Their whole "world view" was transformed! The sermon was meant to explore the biblical value of exercising the "gift of hospitality."¹⁹⁵ In this sermon the writer shared a story of the power of hospitality to resolve conflict and to re-establish community. Shortly after we had arrived at the cottage this summer we learned about a boundary dispute between two cottagers and a local farmer. Nothing like a good "line dispute" to put a dent in a pleasant summer vacation. One of the three property owners in the dispute, a Christian couple from Fredericton, hosted a 60th birthday celebration for a second party in the dispute and invited the third. The other neighbours were invited and everyone had a wonderful evening of fellowship and fun. The result: community developed and the dispute disappeared!

The sermons attempted to move the congregation forward in the ministry of visitation, caring for others, providing hospitality, and building community. Other series of sermons on related themes of "support and caring" were shared by the pastoral staff and lay preachers who were identified with the "preaching" gift in the congregation.

The series, "Ministry of Mutual Support," was preached in August and

¹⁹³ Mark Lauterbach, "Contact", Leadership, 19.4(1998), 34.

¹⁹⁴ Lk. 23:29-32.

¹⁹⁵ Heb. 13:2; Rom. 12:13; 1 Pet. 4:9; 3 Jn.

September, 1997. The sermons were based on a book by Gene A. Getz entitled, *Encouraging One Another*,¹⁹⁶ which explored the "one another" passages in the New Testament.¹⁹⁷ The sermons focused on the importance of building a strong supportive community within the fellowship of the church. The series highlighted some biblical encouragers, like Barnabas, who provide much-needed role models for today's church.

These preaching series provided another foundation stone in building a caring church that would be healthy enough to reach out in the name of Christ to others. A "healthy" church is one that can acknowledge its own weakness, brokenness, and faith struggle and be able to identify the source of spiritual strength and healing (Mt. 11:28-30). The healthy church is able to identify with the suffering of others and bring them to the source of healing and wholeness (Acts 3:1-10). The preaching was meant to prepare the people for ministry in the church and in the community where they live and work. Sunday was seen as a day of preparation for the work and witness of the coming week, a day of strengthening and encouraging.

There is a definite need to preach the whole counsel of God, and to provide a message that can bring restoration and hope for people who sit in the pews weighed down by the burdens of life. Today, there is the urgency to acknowledge the reality of sin and its consequences and to point to the cross and a Saviour who has reached down to lift us up.¹⁹⁸

v. Teaching Sessions - The Joy of Caring

One of the most significant times of preparation for pastoral care took

¹⁹⁶ Getz, I.

¹⁹⁷ Heb. 10:25; 1 Pet.1:22; 1 Pet .3:8; 1 Pet. 4:9.

¹⁹⁸ Haney, 47.

place on Sunday mornings with the classes on *The Joy of Caring*.¹⁹⁹ A husband and wife team, with a deep commitment to caring and building relationships, taught the principal class. A second class which took the "overflow" of people wanting to learn lessons on care-giving was led by the pastor. The course was taught several times as it continued to draw new students who wanted the training.

The purpose of the course was stated in the introduction in these words: *The Joy of Caring* is a resource for Christians who are wondering, "What difference does my Christianity make in the caring and relating I do? The study contains a four-session course to help cultivate effective, Christian care-giving. Its purpose is to "equip the saints for the work of ministry."²⁰⁰

This teaching tool provides positive pointers on how to bring the Christian perspective to the task of care-giving. It rests its case on the importance of giving priority to the spiritual needs of people. Recognizing the complexity of creation, and the value of meeting medical, psychological, and practical needs, the program specifically integrates the "spiritual" into the mix. It discerns that Christians are uniquely equipped to identify and meet the spiritual needs of others.²⁰¹

The course takes a careful look at the obstacles that confront a Christian care-giver and provides some practical ways of overcoming the fear of becoming involved. The second chapter moves the student right into the development of skills that will bring confidence to the task. The wisdom of James is presented as a theological model for focusing on the person being visited. James wrote, "My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry" (Jas.1:19).

¹⁹⁹ Marilyn McCormack and Douglas Hapeman, *The Joy of Caring* (Saint John: United Baptist Convention of the Atlantic Provinces, 1995), 1.

²⁰⁰ McCormack and Hapeman, 1.

²⁰¹ McCormack and Hapeman, 6.

The outline, content, and teaching tools (overheads), provide excellent material for equipping potential visitors. One example of excellence is "the principles of effective listening": (1) give up control; (2) give your undivided attention; (3) suspend judgement; don't try to solve the problem; (4) listen for feelings; (5) listen for the dominant concern; (6) provide feedback; and (7) summarize.

The third chapter looks at problem solving in the act of Christian caregiving. The course provided a process the care-giver could work through in the course of a visit. The list of things one needs to know in a crisis is borrowed from Dr. Hunt's book, *How Can I Help?*, and includes a check list that a visitor might use during a visit (e.g., the physical condition, the presenting problem, the personal behavior, the personal responsibility, etc.).²⁰²

The fourth and final chapter of the training helps the visitor to recognize and carefully apply the distinctively Christian resources that are available. The careful use of Scripture and prayer can make a distinct difference in the healing and help offered to people in the church and in the community. The lesson has very practical with helpful suggestions for providing spiritual assistance to people in need. It answers the Why?, When?, and How? questions of Bible reading and public prayer with people.

The text of the chapter closes by reminding folk of the purpose of applying our Christian resources "to bring reassurance, to comfort when necessary, to deepen understanding, and to strengthen their relationship with God in the midst of their current situation."²⁰³

vi. Visitation Workshops

The staff, assisted by the laity, led evening workshops at the church on

²⁰² McCormack and Hapeman, 27-28.

²⁰³ McCormick and Hapeman, 38.

visitation. Two of the workshops which were well attended by deacons and laity are worth reviewing. Some of the participants were already involved in visitation but wanted to learn more. Others were interested in learning the caregiving skills that might help them in the ministry where they were presently involved in their every day activity of living for Christ, and still others wanted to explore whether or not they could become visitors.

1. Visitation Workshop - January 11, 1997

The workshop was attended by over twenty participants in the church parlor for two hours (9:00 am until 11:00 am) on a Saturday morning. The chairs were placed in a circle for close communication and interaction. The pastor gave the biblical, historical background to the subject, and reviewed the present challenge to the church concerning visitation. This session contributed the theological basis for the church's mission and was put into the context of opportunity and responsibility of the church today. The model of the Saviour and the mandate of the church (Mt. 28:19-20; Acts 1:8;) provided the context of service.

The two-hour workshop then moved into the practical application of the ministry mandate. A period of time was spent learning some skills in the "art of listening". Another aspect of training was the building of relationships within "barriers and boundaries". The visitor was challenged to recognize one's own comfort zone and one's limits. Equally important was the recognition of the limits and comfort zone of the person being visited.

The workshop was designed to be participatory. Both routine and irregular visits were role played by the participants. Time was given after the role-playing for people to ask questions and share their experiences. In the middle of the workshop there was a coffee break and time for conversation and

team building. The morning concluded with a time of open sharing of personal concerns, questions, or stories of visits.

2. Visitation Workshop - May 13, 1997

Because of lack of free space in the building, the meeting had to be in the board room of the church, which is behind the library. The room did not offer much space or flexibility for activities, which limited participation to verbal interaction as a group.

Seventeen people, primarily those participating on the visitation teams, were in attendance. The purpose of the workshop was to strengthen their understanding of the visitation program as well as to work on some of their visitation skills. The session began by identifying the needs of people who participate in the life of First Baptist Church. The class was asked to reflect on the question "Why do people come to our church?" Then the participants explored spiritual needs, family concerns, personal struggles, and the desire to belong and to make a difference in the world.

The session moved then from investigating the needs of the congregation to exploring the goals of the visitor and the visitation program. The class researched the topics of pastoral care, evangelism, invading the space of others and the importance of training for the task. The study moved quickly into the visitation qualities (basic care-giving capabilities) that are needed and how they can be developed in one's daily life. The topics of confidentiality, active listening, being non-judgmental and sharing the faith story were explored by the class.

The workshop ended by spending time exploring areas of professionalism in visitation. The discussion centered around the following areas:

1. Be yourself- integrity;
2. Be human - "lighten up";
3. Get down to business - why you're there!;
4. Know what you are doing - it's a learning experience;
5. Use your authority - God's call, His word and confidence in Him;
6. Be dependable - time (call if late), and don't promise what you cannot do;
7. Be available - don't put it off;
8. Know your limitations - don't develop co-dependency;
9. Be forgiving of yourself - learn from mistakes, continue to prepare and grow; and
10. Being is more important than doing.

The workshops provided an exposure to visitation for those who are expressing interest but are still uncertain. They offered some encouragement and practical training to those who are engaged in the various caring ministries of the church. These workshops served to build relational bridges within the care-giving volunteers in the congregation. The ultimate test of their value will be in the fruit of ministry.

vii. Staffing for Visitation

In 1992 a "coordinator of ministries" staff position was established in the church. The task of coordinator of ministries, along with office management, coordination of programming and use of facilities, was to assist the staff and laity in the organization and implementation of the visitation program. The job description in relationship to visitation included the following: (1) assist staff in co-ordinating visitation; (2) keep records of visits; (3) communicate congregational needs to staff; (4) develop a ministry of "hospitality". The preliminary report on this new position stated the following

rational:

The pastoral staff is busy and active inside and outside the church. The time available for them to do all the visitation they would like is limited, as is the time available for involvement in depth in various ministries. The pastoral staff have also formulated challenging goals for themselves over the next five years. A staff position which would free time for the pastoral staff to pursue these goals, to pursue the ministries to the depth they feel is necessary, and to do the pastoral visitation they would like to do would reap many benefits. A staff position which would relieve the staff of administrative details and coordination would allow the staff time to see the "big" picture. The staff and deacons can use the assistance of a staff team member in coordinating visitation, and in welcoming and integrating newcomers.²⁰⁴

There always seems to be a question in the minds of some members when additional staff is added to the church. The question is: "Will the church be paying someone to do the work that volunteers could be doing?" The new staff position was seen as a way to find and deploy more laity in the service of the church. The added efficiency of this new position would insure that more people wanting to serve Christ in the church would find their way to a responsible place of ministry.

The new staff position has been a vital asset in building the visitation program in the church. A computerized system of record keeping was introduced and coordinated from the office. The networking part of this particular position provided priceless assistance to pastors and others in the caring ministry of the church. Needs within the congregation and community were identified and channeled to the pastoral staff and a teams of visitors.

Through the efforts of the new coordinator and her associate, a series of visitation forms were developed. A tear-off section on the Sunday bulletin was

²⁰⁴ First Baptist Church, Dartmouth, Preliminary Report on an Administrative Position for the Church, 1991, 1.

designed that helped in tracking congregational changes and congregational concerns on a weekly basis. This information was recorded so that concerns could be addressed (i.e., prayer requests would be channelled to prayer groups within the church).

B. PRACTICE

i. Deacons and Church Members

The pastoral staff on a regular basis took deacons and interested laity on the rounds of visitation to homes, hospitals, prisons and seniors' complexes. The visits at times were a response to identified pastoral needs, welcome to new families, or regular visits to keep in touch with the church family. The visits were intended to provide care for the individual or family, build relationships within the church community, and equip the laity in the ministry of visitation. Reports of the visit were recorded on the visitation form and passed to the coordinator of ministries for follow-up.

The afternoons were used to visit primarily shut-ins and seniors. Those available to visit were often the retired members of the church. The evening visits were made to homes of working singles and working families, and often younger visitors were available to assist in the calling. Occasionally, a larger group accompanied the pastor and provided prayer, communion, and special healing services for those in need.

There were a variety of reasons why the visits were made to the different people groups within the contact of the church's ministry. The purpose of the visit may have been:

- (1) providing comfort and support at a time of bereavement;
- (2) celebrating with a young family at the birth of a child;
- (3) building a relational bridge with a couple who asked the church to

facilitate their marriage;

(4) coming alongside a person or family in crisis (marriage break-up, job loss, etc.);

(5) supporting people in sickness through hospital and home visits;

(6) responding to an inquiry about faith, commitment to Christ or joining the church;

(7) being a window to the world by visiting people confined to home or institution;

(8) taking food or other supplies to a family in need;

(9) building community by keeping in touch with the members of the congregation; and

(10) discovering people's spiritual gifts and their desire to serve Christ.

Most of the visitation by pastors and laity has been in response to pastoral care needs that were identified. The purpose of the visit was to listen to people, build healthy relationships and introduce them to the Christ who can make a significant difference in their lives. At other times a visit was made to share information about the church and to seek the support of people in the making decisions about future ministry. Occasionally, the purpose of the visit was primarily evangelistic and the visitors went prepared to share their faith in the home of the visited.

ii. The Seniors' Visitation Committee

This program primarily consisted of people already involved in seniors' visitation. An attempt was made to put structure and accountability to the ongoing visitation practice of this group. A regular meeting time was set for evaluation of visits and to identify people who may have been missed. More accurate recording of seniors was developed through the cooperative efforts of

staff and the visitors. The meetings were meant to provide support and encouragement to those who regularly visit people who were marginalized by health and age.

iii. The Tel-e-Care Ministry

A ministry plan was developed to keep in touch with specific groups within the church family. "Tel-e-Care" was primarily a ministry through the telephone but also included visits to the homes where specific needs surfaced. Specific people groups were targeted, workers recruited who would relate to that group, and a distinct design of ministry developed. The five specific people groups identified were: (1) seniors and shut-ins; (2) sickness and loss/grief; (3) families with new babies; (4) engaged and newlyweds; and (5) families new to the church.

The "seniors group" was passed to the established seniors' visitation committee. The "grief/loss" group was identified and some effort was made to address this need within the congregation. The "new mothers" group was identified and a systematic visitation program was developed. The "families with new babies" were visited by the pastor and designated laity who took a special gift for the child. Continual contact and follow-up with these families was maintained.

The premarital group was invited to share in a marriage preparation class, along with the wedding preparation classes with the pastor who performed the wedding. The classes consisted of marriage videos followed by a discussion that was led by gifted laity from the congregation. The classes provided a bridge to help new people build some healthy friendships within the church family.

iv. Summer Student Program

The summer months provided an opportunity for First Baptist Church in Dartmouth to develop an outreach ministry to the church and the community through the employment of students. Each summer between five and ten high school and university students were employed to develop creative ministries. They were involved with the pastoral staff and laity in a variety of ways, such as: (1) summer worship services; (2) vacation Bible school (First Baptist Church and other area churches); (3) camping (Bayside Baptist Camp), (4) summer mission tours (Canada and overseas); (5) Summer Fun (inner city children's programs); (6) visitation to seniors and shut ins; and (7) Christian recreational programs, etc.

One of the primary values of the program was the equipping of students for ministry in the church and in the community. One important aspect of the training was "the mentoring of students" by the staff and senior students (some were employed three or more years) in such areas as: (1) worship leadership; (2) program development; (3) personal spiritual growth; (4) visitation; (5) preaching; (6) puppetry; and (7) leadership.

The summer was a time to give many of the year-round volunteers a break from their commitments and to allow the students to perform the tasks and develop leadership skills. The practical experience under supervision provided valuable training for many young people in the church. The students grew in their faith and leadership skills and many responded to the call of God to enter church vocations. The church was greatly enriched through their spiritual gifts, youthful enthusiasm, and creative outreach adventures.

The congregation, seeing the value to the students and the church through the summer program, has added student leadership throughout the fall to spring school terms as well. The church, as a result, has had a continuing

flow of 15 students who prepared for Christian ministry. These young men and women serve as models for others in the congregation (young and old) and have encouraged many to consider serving Christ in a greater capacity.

v. H.O.M.E. Groups (Homes Open to Ministry and Evangelism)

The idea of Small Group Ministry at First Baptist, Dartmouth, was conceived when pastors and people attended a seminar on the subject at the Moncton Wesleyan Church in 1994. The delegation to Moncton came home with a positive view of how small groups led by "lay pastors" could enrich the pastoral care of the congregation. It was their belief that lay people would discover a new level of commitment and service opportunity and that the pastoral staff would be provided with a helpful resource for meeting the needs of the church.

The first step was to seek out and evaluate churches in Canada and the United States that have been successful in small group ministries. Audio tapes from Skyline Community Church in San Diego California were distributed to the deacons. A "small groups" report, developed by a committee of the deacons' board and pastoral staff, was given unanimous approval and a series of leadership training sessions was implemented. The small group ministry was seen by the church as an urgent need and the decision was made to "fast track" the project and the proposal called "Five by 95" was put in motion.

The aim of the small groups was to strengthen the ministry of visitation in the church in five areas: (1) development of leadership skills; (2) augmentation of pastoral care in the church; (3) deepening of friendships; (4) discovery of spiritual gifts and abilities; and (5) strengthening people's attachment to the church and its ministry.

vi. A Deacons' Visitation Program

The resignation of the senior pastor of First Baptist Church in Dartmouth in the fall of 1997 began the process of developing a deacons' initiated visitation program. The church saw the interim time between senior pastors as a window of opportunity to involve the laity in a more intense way in the program of pastoral care. Together with the associate staff, they would assume the responsibility for becoming "shepherds" (1 Pet. 5:2) of the church family. A member of the staff was asked to provide the leadership in developing the program.

Part of the rationale for the program was described in the following way:

-- What will be achieved if you visit?

(1) You will be showing love for the family -- just by your presence, your personal concern will become visible and real.

(2) You will be sharing your faith -- not necessarily verbally, but just by the act of going and seeing people where they live.

(3) You will be looking for and finding talents within the First Baptist fellowship. God can use you to build up God's work here.

-- What will I get if I go?

(1) New friends. The visitor will be surprised by how much the visited people warm up to their visit. Next Sunday, the visited will likely see them in church and will be glad to greet the visitor.

(2) A feeling of satisfaction. In faith, the visitor takes a risk and sees it pay off.

(3) A feeling of accomplishment. The reward may be the anticipation of hearing the Lord's thanks for helping somebody with a "cup of cold water."²⁰⁵

Nobody who gives the least thing to help out another person in Jesus' name

²⁰⁵ Mk. 9:41.

will ever lose his or her reward!²⁰⁶

Using the computer based files, the planning committee estimated that the church consisted of 340 active households, and another 250 households that were affiliated with the congregation. The affiliated households were those who attended sporadically, having a connection through weddings, funerals, or some past event that drew them into the life of the congregation. The "Visiting Program - Numbers Summary" gave the total care responsibility of the congregation at 590 households.²⁰⁷

The committee first explored the possibility of visiting in various districts or areas of the city. Then the households were divided into categories based on age, marriage, and children. They settled with this format and decided to tackle one particular group at a time. The program was designed with pastoral staff participating alongside the deacons' board in the following way.

Phase One.

Assign leaders to each team from Deacons' Board. Also assign a pastor with each team. Teams will make contact and arrange "twosomes" for all households. Each team is to complete work by program end date.

Team agrees to perform all visits within a definite period of time. The period could be as short as two weeks or as long as several months.

Phase Two.

Each team meets and divides tasks among itself. Tasks can be divided differently by each team. Teams may agree that one member can carry more or less of the workload, or perform mainly the phone-contacting work. The main task in Phase Two is recruiting "twosomes" from master lists of potential visitors. Each team submits its plan and targets to the deacons' board and deacons' visiting coordinator.

²⁰⁶ Ted Newell, "Visiting: An Action of Faith" (Dartmouth: First Baptist Church, 1997).

²⁰⁷ Ted Newell, "Plan Possible: Ministry of Visiting, First Baptist Church" (Dartmouth, 1997).

Phase Three.

The coordinator arranges that the team, including new recruits, attend a briefing workshop. The workshop will serve as the kick-off for the visitation program. Participants would be given strong reasons why visiting is important, examine strategies for visits, and role-play a "normal" and an "unusual" visit.

Phase Four.

The team leader assigns contacts and visits to its visitors. The total number of households is divided by the number of "twosomes", the number of visits per week or month each "twosome" can carry out, and the duration of the program (decided either by the deacons' board as a whole or by the team).

Phase Five.

Each team reports to the Deacons Board's monthly meeting. Reports may be presented either in verbal or in a written form.²⁰⁸ The Board assesses the program's progress and plans whatever adjustments are necessary.

Phase Six.

The conclusion and evaluation. The program's weaknesses and strengths should be assessed for possible future efforts. The process should alert those involved to new lay ministry opportunities with the types of households that have been visited. Visiting will turn up ways that the church can do its ministry in a more sensitive and effective manner. The attempt will be made to stimulate responses by church members to some new opportunities.

Also, at evaluation time, the opportunity to offer the possibility of

²⁰⁸ Newell, Plan Possible, 2-3.

ongoing visiting to some of the twosomes will be provided. Some twosomes may find themselves excited by their new ministry and wish to carry on and develop that ministry as the future unfolds. The program may uncover new gifts of compassion with the visiting teams.²⁰⁹

This outlined program of visitation has been set out as an "ideal" model to follow. However, the plan was scaled down to meet the limited resources in the beginning stage. One of the proposed people groups (Married Mature) of 70 households became the first visitation assignment of the combined teams. Deacons were invited to choose a partner (or go alone) to make the visits. By the year's end the task was completed and a committee of three deacons and three staff was given the responsibility of evaluating the results and planning future visitation assignments.

C. APPRAISAL

In *The Master Plan of Evangelism*, Robert E. Coleman notes how Jesus kept a check on the ministry of the disciples. After they had been out on a mission he would bring them together to assess the results. During these times of evaluation he would reflect on their experience to discover principles that would help them in their future ministry. Coleman writes of Jesus' appraisal: "His questions, illustrations, warnings, and admonitions were calculated to bring out those things that they needed to know in order to fulfill His work, which was the evangelization of the world."²¹⁰

The following are a number of the tools developed for recording visits by the ministry staff at First Baptist Church in Dartmouth. These forms and forums were designed to provide a close evaluation and appraisal of the ministry of visitation. They provide a continuing assessment of the visits and

²⁰⁹ Newell, *Plan Possible*, 2-3.

²¹⁰ Robert E. Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism* (Westwood: Fleming H. Revell, 1963), 94.

visitors and assist in keeping track of needs that surface during the course of the ministry.

i. Pastors' Visitation Record

These forms were filled out and handed on to the coordinator for follow up. Needs for further visits were recorded and a time was set. Youth opportunities were passed to the youth minister. Potential musicians or singers were referred to the ministry of music. The forms helped to make the pastoral care of people more effective. People who were sick or who had sickness in the family would be noted for prayer. People's needs were reported with sensitivity (e.g., some people are shy about having their names placed in the church bulletin). The system also enabled the church to celebrate with people who had significant anniversaries, achievements, or events in their lives (e.g., the birth of a child).

ii. Pastoral Telephone Call Record

As previously mentioned, First Baptist Church, because of its inner city location, the scope of its regional ministry and multiplicity of its social programs, needs to be "high touch"! Keeping in touch with people who attend a regional church is of great importance. There are not the natural contacts that would be present in a smaller community where people meet each other at the post office or grocery store. Brief phone calls to make contact, discover needs, and affirm people were a significant part of the continuing pastoral care of the congregation. The recording of these calls enabled the staff and leadership of the church to build bridges and meet needs.

iii. Visitation Report Forms

The visitation reports were passed into the coordinator of ministries to record the visit (time, place, by whom) and any significant information that needed follow up. If any serious issues were uncovered during the visit that needed attention, permission was requested from the person being visited to share the information with the pastoral staff. The reporting system enabled the church to know who was being visited at regular times and who was being missed. Periodic updates keep the needs of people who should be visited before the pastoral staff and the visitors from the church teams.

iv. Seniors' Visitation Meeting

The ministry opportunities of the local church never remain static. First Baptist Church has a continuing ministry contact with 70 seniors and a list of over 170 seniors that are affiliated with the church. The mobility of society means that the picture is in continual change and in need of review. The meeting of the Seniors' Visitation Committee, held every six to eight weeks, provided a time when the church's ministry to this segment of its population can be reviewed and future plans developed. The format of each meeting included:

- (1) a time to report on visits accomplished and needs identified;
- (2) a time to reflect on subjects of interest (often stories) relating to seniors in the church and community - a brief training time;
- (3) a time to appraise the overall program and its effectiveness;
- (4) a time to plan new strategies for ministry with seniors; and
- (5) a time of sharing articles or recommending books related to the art of visiting. The leader sometimes shared valuable items of instruction for visiting seniors from a volunteer's guide called, *Where Life's Harvest*

*Mellows.*²¹¹

Out of these discussions came the development of seniors' lunch groups of 8-10 people, each one organized by one two members of the visitation team. Sometimes they met in homes but usually they ventured off to a restaurant. It was a time of fun and fellowship for seniors in the church. This ministry event has continued to grow and meet some of the social and spiritual needs of seniors in the church. Another ministry that developed from the seniors' visitation committee was "birthday calls". Different workers take turns every month phoning seniors on their birthday and letting these people know that they are being remembered by the church family.

v. Deacons' Visitation Program Reports

The "visitation report" of the deacons' program was designed to provide a record that would help them keep track of their visits and enable the leadership to measure their progress. A form was given to the deacons and other visitors to report on their phone call and first visit to the household. The form provides room to record information regarding the response to both phone call and visit. There is ample space to write down concerns experienced in the contact (guarding confidentiality) and information related to a follow up of the call. These forms were to be passed in at the deacons meeting following the visit for further ministry response.

In review, the program of visitation at First Baptist Church in Dartmouth has evolved over a long period of time. Historically, the ministry of visitation has been the mandate of the senior minister of the church with occasional forays into the "harvest field" by the deacons' board or a few

²¹¹ Sister St. Michael Guinan & John A. MacPherson, Where Life's Harvest Mellows, A Guide for Volunteers Preparing for Pastoral Care Visiting (Canadian Institute of Religion and Gerontology, Canadian Association of the Sovereign and Military Order of Malta, 1984).

members who have had an interest in visitation. The building blocks of the present visitation ministry of the church were constructed over the past ten years as the desire to make lay involvement more intentional.

The growth of the care-giving ministries of the church widened the circles of influence that the church was having in the community. The numerical growth in the congregation expanded the need for pastoral care. The demands of youth ministry, social outreach to the community, and growing numbers of seniors, forced the leadership of the church to notice that "people who care for others need to be cared for". Strengthening the pastoral staff, developing support groups (small group ministry), and building a more effective program of visitation were priorities for the congregation's leaders.

First Baptist Church of Dartmouth has put a great amount of prayer, planning, and a considerable amount of time, talent, and treasure into providing effective pastoral care for its members and the wider community it serves. The pastoral staff has helped to shape the vision and provide training to the laity and leadership to the ministry. They have sought to be both models and mentors for the people who responded to the call of Christ upon their lives to serve in these significant care-giving ministries.

The church has developed effective systems of record keeping and accountability. The report forms and visitation records provide a system for those involved in visitation to assess their progress. They allow visitors to measure their personal progress and it helps them to be aware of the task still to be completed. The mentoring process provided an opportunity for the visitors to share their stories with a pastor who could enable them to learn from mistakes and improve future visits. The larger visitation meetings assessed the larger picture and explored how the church could continue to meet the challenge of providing pastoral care to its people and effective outreach to the

community. To have a program is one thing, to measure its effectiveness is another. In this next chapter an attempt will be made to measure the effectiveness of the present program of visitation at First Baptist Church.

Chapter Five

PROJECT EVALUATED

A. INTRODUCTION TO EVALUATION

The subject of this paper continues to be a passion of the writer. The lessons learned in visitation, the friendships formed and transformed, and the miracles of God experienced have shaped the writer's spiritual journey. Time after time, the writer and others who shared the ministry of visitation have identified with the seventy-two disciples of Jesus who joyfully returned from their mission saying, "...Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name" (Lk. 10:17).

The process has had its moments of elevation when the study revealed that progress has been made in the ministry undertaken by the church. However, it also has had its reality checks when evaluation brought to light the mistakes made, the goals unmet, and the tasks still unfinished. The process of evaluation is vitally important to the church and its ministry. George Barna reminds us: "One sign of a healthy person or institution is the willingness to delve beneath the surface and to emerge with an honest assessment of what is being done and how well it is being accomplished."²¹²

Pastoral care is a great privilege. Visiting brings affirmation. To be recognized and warmly greeted by the marginalized people of the inner city that one have visited brings a sense of joy to a pastor or lay volunteer. It is satisfying to know that people trust the visitor enough to share the deep struggles and great celebrations of life. Visiting builds lasting friendships and bonds believers in the fulfillment of service. Many who are lonely and in need of the human touch are blessed by the message and messenger who come in the

²¹² George Barna, Today's Pastors (Ventura: Regal Books, 1993), 19.

name of Christ.

Visitation brings blessing to the church community. Preaching is enriched by the preacher who becomes acquainted with his parishioners. The fellowship of worship is enriched because people now know one another. There is an excitement when new faces begin to appear in the service of worship as a result of the contacts made through visitation. The ministry of the church is advanced by the spiritual gifts that have been discovered and are being used in the witness and work of the congregation.

The proficiency of the visitation program in a local church impacts the growth and vitality of its total ministry. Therefore it is important to evaluate the program in process to determine if it is meeting the intended goals. In his book, *The Other Side of Pastoral Ministry*, Daniel A. Brown speaks of evaluation in these words:

One of the most important processes in church leadership-evaluation-is the easiest to neglect, but we overlook it to our loss. If we don't know what we have done right, we can't build on it as effectively for the future. If we don't know why something failed, we will likely repeat our mistakes. Effective leaders regularly evaluate their organizations because they know organizations produce the results they are designed to produce.²¹³

Evaluation has a theological basis in faith and covenant. In the process of evaluation we are working together as God's co-labourers to improve the task by examining our progress. Evaluation is always meant to strengthen God's work and to enrich those who serve. Loren B. Mead penned these powerful words:

Evaluation is natural to the human experience. Evaluation is one of God's ways of bringing the history of the past into dialogue with the hope of the future. Without confession of sin there is no thanksgiving; without the counting of blessing there is no

²¹³ Daniel A. Brown, *The Other Side Of Pastoral Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 176.

thanksgiving; without awareness of potential there is no hope; without hope there is no desire for growth; and without a desire for growth the past will dwarf the future. We are called into new growth and new ministries by taking a realistic and hopeful look at what we have been and what we can still become. Surrounded by God's grace and the crowd of witnesses in the faith, we can look at our past unafraid and from its insights eagerly face the future with new possibilities.²¹⁴

B. THE PROCESS OF EVALUATION

Evaluation of the visitation program at First Baptist Church, Dartmouth, has been an ongoing process. It began when a brief form was provided to record the visits by pastoral staff and lay visitors and to provide important information that needed immediate attention.²¹⁵ The monthly Seniors' Visitation Committee meetings provided a devotional time, relevant teaching, an assessment of needs of the congregation and an evaluation of visits being made. Again, this was done to assist the visitors to review what had been accomplished and to determine the priorities in future ministry. Care was taken in these sessions to share concerns while respecting confidentiality.

During this final period of thesis writing, a questionnaire was sent to present and former staff who have shared with the writer in the ministry of visitation over a number of years. Twenty-five of the thirty-three who received the questionnaire provided a written response. Another three responded to the questions in a personal interview. Most of the responses were from people who had been engaged as students in the ministry training programs of the church and went on to prepare for a Christian vocation in the church. Others were theological students from Acadia Divinity College, whom the church engaged in ministry as a part of their Supervised Field Education studies. The

²¹⁴ Loren B Mead, Evaluation Of, By, For and To the Clergy (Washington: The Alban Institute, 1977), 15.

²¹⁵ See pp. 194-197.

respondents also included several staff members who began their ministry (including pastoral visitation) in the setting of First Baptist Church and who received training at the church. The responses from these students and staff, who were a vital part of the development of the pastoral care and the visitation program of the church, have provided very helpful insights into the evaluation process.

However, the primary tools of the evaluation process are the two questionnaires that were presented to the laity involved in the visitation program and people of the congregation who were visited. Both questionnaires were called "Attitude Toward Visitation Questionnaire".²¹⁶ The purpose of the first questionnaire, given to the visitors, included an invitation for participants to make their contribution to the evaluation of the visitation program of First Baptist Church, Dartmouth. The goal of the evaluation was to improve the program of visitation and pastoral care in the church.

The first twenty people who were contacted offered to participate by filling in the questionnaire. They were informed that their participation would assist the writer in completing the D.Min. thesis/project for Acadia Divinity College. They were invited to meet in groups (seventeen participants) in the writer's home on a Saturday morning or afternoon for one and half hours.

The meetings were structured but informal. The participants were given about thirty-five minutes for filling in the questionnaire. This was followed by a brief refreshment time and a forty-five minute question and answer period on the subject of visitation. The discussion that centered around the last page of questions on the questionnaire was taped. Very little prompting was needed as the discussion was lively and very interactive. The participants appeared to enjoy the topic and opportunity to share their views. The writer was

²¹⁶ See pp. 174-187.

encouraged by their willingness to participate and the creative level of insight given to the subject. Three of the visitors, because of their inability to attend the scheduled meetings, were given the questionnaire at another time and completed the group of participants.

Also, thirty-eight people who had received a lay visitor in their home were selected to respond to a questionnaire that would provide another perspective on the value of the program. It was explained to them that a visit from the deacons' board, a member of the visitation committee, or a member of the church visiting with the pastor would qualify them to fill in a questionnaire. Again, it was explained to participants that their cooperation would help the writer in the completion of his D.Min. thesis/project and their effort would assist in the church in the analysis of its visitation program. The cover of the questionnaire explained the purpose, called their attention to the confidentiality of the forms and expressed the writer's gratitude for the significant contribution they were making.

Some of the people receiving a questionnaire had not been visited by anyone other than the pastor. This was a surprise to the writer and to the present staff at the church, highlighting the need for a more concerted effort and better recording of visits. Two of the homes that were contacted took some time to recall that they had been visited by people from the deacons' board or the visitation committee. With this response came an awareness that visitors do not always identify that they are visiting on behalf of the church. Again, people were very willing to participate in the process and a questionnaire was dropped off at their home. The majority of responses were put in an envelope at the church's Welcome Center during the Sunday services.

The whole process of evaluation has been a special time of learning for the writer. Looking at the ministry of visitation that was established in the

church and exploring its development, implementation and continuation from a bit of distance (resigned pastorate eighteen months ago) has been challenging. The learning experience has brought a new understanding of the words of Melvin J. Steinbron in his book, *Can The Pastor Do It Alone?*, "It's not what is expected that gets done, it's what is inspected."²¹⁷ " The evaluation process has provided the writer with a new perspective on this program that has evolved over time. Again, being engaged in the process helps to celebrate the accomplishments of the ministry and brings to light the goals still to be met. This evaluation exercise, hopefully, will move the church forward in its ministry of pastoral care within the congregation and outreach to the community.

Building a continuing and careful evaluation process into the ministry of visitation will impact the outcome considerably. Looking back through critical eyes has value if the lessons learned become the building blocks of future ministry. The responses of those who visited on behalf of the church (20) and those who were visited (38) will now be reported and evaluated, leading to the final analysis with its conclusions and recommendations.

The questionnaires were designed to receive responses from the participants through the use of two types of multiple choice questions. The first set of questions asked for the participant to indicate their preference on the following scale: SA (Strongly Agree) A (Agree) PA (Partially Agree) to PD (Partially Disagree) D (Disagree) SD (Strongly Disagree). The second set of questions asked the participant to rank their response on a scale of priority from #1 (First) to # 6 (last). The questionnaire presented to the visitors included a page of discussion questions.

²¹⁷ Steinbron, 71.

C. RESPONSE FROM VISITOR

The initial phone call to invite people to assist in filling out a visitation questionnaire explained the purpose of the exercise. As noted earlier, twenty visitors offered to participate in the "Attitude Toward Visitation" questionnaire. Eighteen of the questionnaires were completed and two were incomplete (some questions not answered). Eleven of the visitors were male and nine were female, and the majority (75%) were over fifty years of age. Most of the visitors (55%) were very involved and (45%) somewhat involved in the ministry of the church. Several (10 and 13) indicated that they had served in the traditional leadership positions (deacons and council) and have been a part of the church visitation program for more than three years. Only five were under fifty years of age (40-49) and only three have been on the visitation committee for less than three years.

All of the people, except one, that were invited to participate in the questionnaire had been involved at some point in visitation with the writer. The other one had shared considerable visitation with another member of staff. Although three of the visitors had been involved only in recent years, they all have had valuable ministry experiences that added credibility to their responses to the questionnaire.

The visitors' questionnaire reveals a deep concern for those in need. The strongest response in the SA category (20 or 100%) was for the visitation of shut-ins. Visitation of the sick and bereaved were at the top, or near the top, of the visitation priority for both pastor (ranked #1 and #2) and visitation committee (ranked #2 and #3). The visitors expressed a concern for both inactive members and people outside the church family. It appears that their focus has been primarily on pastoral care as a way to share their faith and bring the gospel to people. Evangelizing the lost followed pastoral care (ranked 3) in

what most influenced them to visit. Visiting non-Christians was ranked last by the respondents as the priority of both the visitation committee and the pastor. This may reflect the visitors understanding of evangelism as primarily caring for the identified needs of people (e.g. sick, bereaved). It also may reflect their lack of comfort with very focused evangelistic visiting and the need for teaching/equipping in this aspect of ministry.

The questionnaire points to the prominence of the pastor as the primary visitor in the church even by laity involved in this ministry (80%). Particularly, in a crisis, the participants expressed (during the discussion) that the visit should be made by the pastor of the church. However, it was maintained (95%) that the visitation committee should be responsible for hospital visits in support of the pastoral staff. Furthermore, the visitors questionnaire places the visitation of new families as a priority for the laity (ranked #1). It is noted that the visitation ministry should be the concern of the congregation as a whole (95%), even though everyone is not comfortable serving as a church visitor. The visitor's discussion reflected the response to the questionnaire that not everyone in the congregation is called or gifted as a visitor (D 25%).

The visitors expressed their pleasure in being involved in this ministry (100%) and felt that it enhanced their spiritual growth (100%), some feeling more strongly than others (SA 7, A 12, PA 1). About half of the group expressed moments of anxiety and times of insecurity in the ministry (55%) and had some measure of discomfort visiting people they did not know. Half (50%) encountered situations with which they were not trained to deal). Many (65%) found their shyness a hindrance to some degree (SA 1, A 3, PA 9). Uncertainty about what was expected of them, created a measure of fear in some visitors (45%). Everyone felt that further training would be beneficial (100%) and that mentoring (ranked #1) was the most helpful method in their

experience. The desire for more training is reflected in the responses given to a number of other questions (e.g., “uncertainty about what is expected during the visit” and “encountered situations with which I was not trained to deal”).

During the discussion, assistance in doing the devotional part of the visit was seen as a training priority.

The primary reason (ranked #1) that they volunteered to serve in visitation was because someone asked them to participate. The opportunity to minister to others (ranked # 2) was viewed as a motivation to become involved in visitation. The ranking of these responses raises the important issue of enabling members of the congregation to discover their spiritual gifts and meaningful places of service.

The visitors expressed that a significant reward of this ministry was building friendships (ranked #1) with their visiting partners and the people of the congregation. They saw part of the value of their ministry in that it strengthened the witness of the church (ranked #2) and their personal faith (ranked #3).

D. RESPONSE FROM VISITED

The "Attitude Toward Visitation" questionnaire that was given to people in the congregation who had received a visit from the laity, brought a response from nineteen men and nineteen women. Half of the group (18) were over fifty and the other half (20) were spread between thirty and fifty years of age.

Another four questionnaires were discarded because the person had not received a visit from a member of the church. The message was either not communicated clearly or they misunderstood the basis of their participation.

They were able to answer questions about "how they would feel toward a visitor" but were unable to answer questions about "a specific visit ". Over half of the group (55%) had been visited within the past year so their experience would be recent. The respondents (the visited) to this questionnaire were less committed in the life of the church and represent a wider age range than the visitors. The homes visited would include shut-in members who were no longer able to serve, and people who were new contacts (e.g. possibly through a church wedding or involvement in one of the many programs at the church). However, most of those visited are consistent in their church attendance with only (18%) reporting that they came occasionally or not at all. The majority of people (63%) have been visited one to three times in the past three years. Less than half (13) have been visited four or more times in the past three years by the lay visitors from the church.

The overwhelming response (95%) of those who filled the questionnaire were very appreciative of the visit by the church member. The majority (34 of 38) would welcome another visit by the visitation committee, especially at a time of need (e.g., bereavement, 100%). There was a feeling among the visited (87%) that the people who visited their home genuinely cared about them and (97%) felt that that visiting strengthened the witness of the church.

The responses about the mechanics of the visit were positive as well. The tone of the conversation was appreciated (92%) and those who hosted the visit (100%) felt that length of the visit was appropriate, with four of that

number noting a partial agreement. Nearly all the respondents (36 of 38) found the visit a blessing and an encouragement to their faith (92%). Over half of the visited (60%) had been assisted in a personal struggle through the sensitivity and caring of the visitor. The weight of the response was for prayer during the visit and the appropriate use of Bible reading. While some would not be offended if a visitor from the church dropped in unannounced, most (97%) expressed appreciation of the visitor phoning ahead to make arrangements for the visit because of the busyness of family life. The respondents were divided about their preference for a single visitor or having the visitor come with a partner.

The visited who responded to this questionnaire were divided on whether the pastor's visit meant more to them (63%) than a member of the church's visitation committee (37%). Even among those that prefer a pastor's visit (26%) were only in partial agreement. They prefer someone that they know (58%) to make the visit. In a time of crises most (84%) would prefer a visit from the pastor but they would welcome a visit from a church member during hospitalization (95%).

Again, the issue of the importance of relationships comes out of the response to the questionnaire. A majority (71%) discovered new friends or deepened existing friendships through the home visits. The visited welcome news and information about the church during visits (74%). The questionnaire brought a (92%) positive response to the question of encouraging the faith in the lives of the visited. Most (89%) felt that the church demonstrated a personal interest in them through its visitation program. The visited recognize this as more than a program-a part of the biblical mandate to the church (97%).

E. OBSERVATIONS

Writing this thesis has renewed the writer's appreciation for the laity. Along with that acknowledgment comes a new appreciation of the church and a confidence in its future (Phil. 1:3-6). Years of planning and implementing the visitation program in First Baptist Church and months of evaluating the results has brought into focus the congregation's strength to serve Christ in their place of ministry. Growing numbers of mature people have become involved in the visitation program. People within the congregation continually demonstrate their pastoral concern for others in a variety of ways. The value of the visitation ministry can also be measured by the success of a number of programs that have been developed to care for people (e.g., seniors' luncheons; gifts delivered to new mothers, etc.). The mentoring of young adults in the care-giving ministries of the church has led many of them to seek a vocation in Christian ministry. Others have had their sense of call confirmed and strengthened in the practice of ministry at First Baptist Church. A stronger sense of ownership of the ministry of visitation by the laity developed with a willingness to share the vision of pastoral care and outreach.

In the questionnaires, both visitors and visited responded positively that visitation was a valued part of the church's ministry. They viewed the ministry as a way to strengthen the church and to enrich the spiritual lives of those who participated. The responses suggest that spiritual needs were being met in both the visitors and the people they visited. However, there are areas that would be enriched through more consistent training and the development of a structure for the program.

During the discussion, a visitor commented that the most significant thing we can communicate to people is "we care". The fact that some felt uncertain about beginning a conversation, the appropriateness of Scripture and

how to handle unexpected situations, leads to the need for ongoing times of training. Visitation training should include sessions on personal evangelism and sharing one's spiritual story. The personal caring often opens the door to share the deeper things of Christ with people during a visit. The visitor needs to be equipped to handle these moments.

A review of the goals of the visitation program at First Baptist Church reveals that they have been partially fulfilled. This fact is supported by the responses from both the visitors and visited who were questioned. They referred to the experience of being visited as "a blessing", which encouraged their faith and helped to meet their spiritual needs. For the visitor it was a time of discovering the importance of ministry and providing spiritual growth. A deacon involved in the visitation program at the church reported that the experience was life-transforming. Some of the goals of the visitation program were:

- (1) To meet the pastoral needs of the church;
- (2) To reach out and provide spiritual care in the community;
- (3) To select capable people who can serve in this ministry;
- (4) To provide adequate training for those who invest their time in this ministry;
- (5) To provide adequate leadership to maintain the program;
- (6) To provide an administrative system that can sustain the program;
- (7) To put in place a support system that complements the ministry of visitation;
- (8) To provide times of encouragement and celebration for those who serve;
- (9) To coordinate the visitation program with the other ministries of the church; and
- (10) To provide an effective process of evaluation that enriches the ministry.

The relational strength of the visitation program was confirmed in the questionnaire when the visitors marked "building friendships" as a primary reward (ranked #1) for their participation. The visited gave a strongly positive response (27 of 38) to the question on making friends through the visits. This point was affirmed in the discussion where the visitors identified friendships that began during a home visit and then continued both in the church and community. They also noted the deepening of friendships through sharing together in the ministry of visitation.

The questionnaires clearly recognize that visitation deepens and strengthens and enriches the life of the community of faith. Through visitation, the needs of people are discovered, spiritual resources are acknowledged and both visitor and visited recognize opportunities to serve. Visitation provides a channel of communication from the church to the home and back to the church.

There was recognition from the visitors' questionnaire that training could improve the ministry. On-the-job training was seen by many of the visitors as being the most effective way of enriching their ability to serve. The majority of visitors appreciated the personal support and practical guidance provided by the mentoring model. At the same time they welcomed seminars and workshops on a variety of topics (e.g., beginning a conversation; use of prayer and Bible reading; sensing when a visit is appropriate; and handling a family crisis).

The questionnaires reveal that people expect the pastor to respond to crisis. The responses reflect a traditional view that in the church, the primary visitor is the pastor. The pastor is the shepherd who cares for the needs of the sheep (1 Pet. 5:2). This raises the issue of the historical tension between the pastor and people in the practice of ministry. However, there was a marked openness by the respondents to have the laity visit them, especially during

sickness. The laity scored higher (ranked #1) than the pastor on visiting new people in the church. The pastor was viewed as the prime visitor to people in crisis, the bereaved and sick in hospital. Yet, the visited responded positively (95%) to a visit from the laity in a time of need. While the majority of those visited (60%) felt they had been well cared for in the visitation of the church, it is encouraging to realize that (89%) would welcome another visit. Only one respondent to the questionnaire was reluctant after the last visit to have another from the laity. The willingness of people to visit and to receive lay visitors in their homes and in hospital is an encouragement to First Baptist Church, Dartmouth, to continue to teach, equip and empower the ministry of the laity.

F. RECOMMENDATIONS

There is a long history of lay visitation in the ministry of First Baptist Church, Dartmouth. The church has continued over the years to build on a solid foundation of lay leadership in the ministry of congregational care and community outreach.²¹⁸ The many changes in culture and current religious life challenge the church to evaluate its methods of ministry. This thesis/project traces some of the processes of transformation taking place in the church over the years and the fruit of those changes in the ministry today.

The breakdown of family life has profoundly impacted the pastoral care of a congregation. The reality of both parents being in the workforce has altered the face of volunteerism. The consumer mentality has helped to define expectations in the Western church. Rapid mobility has affected long term relationships and commitment to ministry. Individualism and urbanization both have an effect on the church's way of networking and building community.

First Baptist Church has sought to be on the cutting-edge of ministry

²¹⁸ P.A. Wallace, 100th Anniversary of First United Baptist Church Dartmouth (Kentville: Kentville Publishers, 1943), 16-17.

and has attempted to communicate the relevant Christ to the rapidly changing culture. Among other changes the church has contextualized worship, giving a variety of options to its wide scope of membership. Programs have been developed to meet the needs of broken families and those that experience loneliness and alienation in life. The church has crossed cultures to provide an effective ministry to the marginalized around its door. Consideration has been given to the needs of youth and special programs of evangelism, discipleship and mission have been designed with their participation.

The leadership has welcomed a continuous process of teaching and equipping for lay leadership in church ministry. The account of seminars and visitation workshops recorded in chapter four gives evidence of the scope of that undertaking. It was also noted that biblical preaching and teaching has emphasized the priesthood of believers and the cooperative function of the church as the body of Christ. The church has viewed visitation as a vital part of creating a caring community that meets the needs of its families and attracts those in search of faith and meaning. Considerable resources have been expended by the church to improve the effectiveness of the ministry of visitation. As a result the writer has discovered many positive things in this journey that commends the care-giving of the church through its visitation program. At the same time, as outlined in the introduction, there is room to improve and build upon the foundations that have been laid. Therefore, the following are the writer's recommendations as the church moves into the twenty-first century:

i. Visitation - Casting a Clear Vision

Matthew records the account of the risen Christ calling his early church to a mountainside commissioning service. It was there that he set before them a

vision of what God was going to do through their witness. The clarion call was:

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I will be with you always, to the very end of the age” (Mt. 28: 18-20).

This strong biblical mandate and its relevant application in today’s world calls the church to put the ministry of visitation at the very heart of its mission. Telephone calls across the Baptist constituency in Canada revealed a number of churches that have put visitation as a high priority in their ministry. There were valuable lessons on the subject that these visitation programs revealed.

West Hill Park Baptist Church in Regina, Canada, provides a model of church growth in our culture that puts visitation as the centrepiece of its mission. The pastor, Rev. James Wells was able create a clear vision of God’s leading for that community of faith. It grew from ninety to over five hundred members in eleven years. The program was led by the pastoral staff but owned and fully supported by the membership of the church. A few years into the program, he was able to write that the church had “... an extremely high degree of unity and commitment to a common goal, namely , renewal of the local church and converts added to Christ’s church.”²¹⁹

People need to have a clearly defined goal that challenges them to commitment. To view visitation as a top priority in the church’s commitment to ministry is vital. The leadership needs to look at the visitation program and study its impact on the health of the other activities of care and outreach in the church. The most recent presentation of a visitation program to the deacons of

²¹⁹ See pp. 82-85.

First Baptist Church, Dartmouth (1998) has been carefully designed and well presented. It gives the “big picture” first and then breaks it down into workable components.²²⁰ If the program is given adequate leadership and communicated carefully to the congregation there is potential to make a significant contribution to the church and wider community for Christ.

First Baptist Church, Dartmouth, should be challenged to build a vision of the visitation ministry around the Scripture passage on the worship service bulletin cover: “equip you with every good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and even. Amen” (Heb. 13:21). These words are a part of the prayer passage, which concludes the letter to the Hebrews. The writer of Hebrews has called on the members of the house church, with whom he is familiar, to pray for those who provide pastoral care in their midst (Heb. 13:18-19). There is a desire for unity and harmony, so that as fellowship is restored, the development and growth of the church will take place. William Lane describes the benediction that follows (Heb. 13:20-21) with these words: “They provide a kerygematic recital of divine activity as the ground of the writer’s confidence in God’s ability and willingness to mature his work within Christians, enabling them to do his will in an acceptable manner.”²²¹

The key word in the passage is katartisai, which is “equip” and it literally means “to make fit, artios, complete.” God alone is able to bring out the full potential in any believer and prepare one for the task of serving in a way that is “pleasing to him”.²²² A vision statement built on this prayer would remind the leadership of the church of the part that God plays in this building process. The vision is about how God leads, protects and provides for the

²²⁰ See pp. 104-105.

²²¹ William L. Lane, Hebrews 9-13 (Dallas: Word, 1991), 560.

²²² Donald Guthrie, The Letter to the Hebrews (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 279.

people who serve and are served in the name of Christ. This comprehensive prayer passage in Hebrews provides a firm foundation to construct a vision of visitation. It addresses the following areas:

1. **Priority.** The prayer points to God as the source of peace in the church and in the world. God has called the church to continue the work of reconciliation that he began in Christ. It is out of recognition of the purpose of “the God of peace” that a vision begins to take shape. No ministry will have continuity if it does not begin with God and his plan for the ekklesia, the people he has called and equipped to serve.
2. **Permanence.** The vision is set upon a solid statement of God’s permanent work of grace in the church and in history. With confidence, believers pray to the God “who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus”. Here is the guarantee that a permanent road (the eternal covenant) to victory has been provided. Today, as in New Testament times, Christians are the resurrection community, marching forward triumphantly focused on Christ their victorious leader (Heb. 12:1-2; Phil. 3:14).
3. **Passion.** The prayer points to the passion of Jesus, “that great Shepherd of the sheep”, who leads his people out of the darkness into the light, out of death into life (Jn. 10: 11, 15). The vision, built upon this prayer, constantly reminds the worker of the tenderness of God in Christ for the lost and the wayward. The church is called to a compassionate ministry for which they become prepared.
4. **Plan.** The prayer provides a practical plan for the ministry of Christ through his church. God “equips you with everything good for doing

his will”, thus providing the community with the gifts needed to complete the body life of the church and give it health. The vision is built upon the confidence that God will supply what is needed for the church. Lane writes, “The substance of the petition [vv. 20-21] is that God may supply what is defective or deficient within the members of the assembly so that they may live the Christian life in a manner that will please him.”²²³

5. **Pleasure.** The prayer brings the vision to a triumphant conclusion and reminds the believer of the joy of service. The writer concludes, “and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.” God reveals himself and his power in the midst of service. There is personal satisfaction and tremendous joy in working to “please him” and bring glory to God (Neh. 12:43; Ps. 126:5; Lk. 10:17; Jn. 4:36).

The vision inspires the leadership to become co-workers with God in preparing the laity to lead in a ministry of visitation that will channel the grace of God into the congregation and out into the world. The vision brings together the following areas of the writer’s recommendation: leadership, training, environment, structure, evaluation and a shared ministry.

ii. Visitation - A Focused Leadership

Vital to the sustainability of the ministry is to find someone within the staff or lay leadership who can provide stable and consistent leadership to this area of ministry. A careful review of the assignments of the present church staff is in order. The models of the Calgary²²⁴ and Chipman²²⁵ churches call for

²²³ Lane, 564.

²²⁴ See pp. 80-82.

²²⁵ See pp. 90-91.

a compassionate and ministry-oriented lay member with a strong gift of administration.

Although the role of the pastor in giving leadership to the visitation program of the church was seen as very important (100%) by the visitors, this does not indicate that he should be the primary facilitator. A time management leader said: “Delegation is the word the time experts use. In the church, delegation means discipling: training others. Leaders don’t do things that others do as well or better.”²²⁶ Often, the pastor neither has the time nor gifts to manage the visitation ministry, but his interest, enthusiasm and leadership are crucial. Selecting and empowering the right person within the staff or lay leadership of the church to direct this ministry will be key to its effectiveness and sustainability.

iii. Visitation - A Continuous Training Program

The questionnaire highlighted the need for a continuing program of training in the church. Those who were visited expressed an openness to have the laity visit them in times of greatest need (95%). Are the visitors prepared to respond appropriately at times of grief and family crisis? Of the visitors who participated in the questionnaire, (75%) responded that they encountered things in their visits that they were not trained to deal with at the time.

The biblical model of Jesus mentoring and equipping his disciples (Lk. 9:1-6) discussed in an earlier chapter²²⁷ and the theme of equipping at the heart of the church’s mission statement (Heb. 13:21)²²⁸ remind the pastoral leadership that they must view their primary task in visitation as teachers - equipping mentors. Their teaching can be accomplished through designing

²²⁶ Muck and Robbins, 17.

²²⁷ See pp. 56-61.

²²⁸ See pp. 102-104.

workshops, leading visitation seminars, providing relevant resources²²⁹ and taking time to mentor. Again, mentoring was ranked highest by the visitors as helpful in learning the art of visitation. Dr. Jerry Barnes, former professor of preaching at Acadia Divinity College said, "If I was to begin ministry again, I would make visiting with the laity a priority."

Being asked (ranked #1) was the prime motivation for people to become involved in the program of church visitation at First Baptist, Dartmouth. The writer has been encouraged in the past by the willingness of the laity to share in the ministry of visitation and recommends that this desire of laity to serve be acknowledged and promoted.

Learning is very often a mutual experience in the mentoring process. In the course of teaching, the mentor can also be enriched and challenged by the one mentored. Paul disciplined Titus, who later came to Paul's rescue during a difficult hour, bringing comfort and encouragement. Paul writes about that encounter, "But God, who comforts the downcast, comforted us by the coming of Titus" (2 Cor. 6:7).

During the discussion of the questionnaire, one of the younger leaders at First Baptist Church, Dartmouth, shared how serving in the ministry of visitation had helped him to overcome shyness, build new friendships, enhance his confidence to serve and strengthen his witness in the home, church and community. The writer, who partnered with him in ministry, watched his life being profoundly changed by God. It is during those times of shared ministry, reflecting on what has happened, that some of the greatest spiritual discoveries are made. The writer found these times of reviewing an afternoon or evening of ministry both enlightening and spiritually renewing (Mk. 6:30). An example of this mentoring process is provided in appendix E.

²²⁹ See pp. 188-189.

Taking what one has learned in ministry and passing it on to another can be very exciting and fulfilling. The principle that Jesus taught about the giver receiving back in abundance applies to the sharing of ministry with young people (Lk. 6:38). The writer's understanding of faith and practice of ministry has been challenged and enriched by the partnership of students and laity. The influence of the young mentorees on the writer's ministry, and upon others who enter into this partnership, is summed up in these words. [They]:

- 1) *Challenged our thinking* by their fresh ideas and different mind set.
- 2) *Tested our flexibility* in developing approaches to familiar problems.
- 3) *Forced a special kind of accountability* that checks our consistency and integrity. A mentoree can quickly spot an inconsistency in a mentor. What we suggest must be real in our lives.
- 4) *Inspired ideals*. Younger mentors are usually refreshingly idealistic. Experience has not yet turned their ideals to cynicism. We've often been renewed and challenged to return to certain ideals.²³⁰

This list identifies some of the benefits of the numerous youth training programs that presently operate at First Baptist Church, Dartmouth. The summer mission tours, the student employment programs, the support of theological students and the host of other training efforts not only equip youth but affect their families and the whole church. These programs bridge the cultures and assure the church of a strong leadership component in the future.

Continuous training is necessary to meet the difficult challenges that face the church in a changing culture. Ongoing training sessions will enrich and strengthen the ministry of those presently involved and keep its

²³⁰ Paul D. Stanley and Robert J. Clinton, Connecting, The Mentoring Relationship You Need to Succeed in Life (Colorado Springs: Navpress, 1992), 15.

significance before the congregation. Training sessions can serve to recruit new workers. Vocational mobility and the changing state of affairs of many involved in the visitation program makes the need for recruitment a continuing process. People within the congregation who work in helping professions (e.g. social workers, nurses, etc.) can provide beneficial resources in training for visitation.

Among the most helpful resources for visitation training listed in Appendix B ²³¹ are:

1. Donald Peel - The Ministry of Listening: Team Visitation in Home and Hospital.
2. Dennis L. Butcher - Developing the Caring Community, A Ten Week-Course in Pastoral Care for the Laity.
3. Marilyn McCormick and Douglas Hapeman - The Joy of Caring, Developing Christian Care-Giving Skills.
4. Harry M. Piland - Going... One on One: Comprehensive Guide for Making Personal Visits.
5. Melvin J. Steinbron - Can The Pastor Do it Alone?: A Model for Preparing People for Lay Pastoring.
6. Kenneth C. Haugk - Stephen Ministries.
7. James Kennedy - Evangelism Explosion.

The first four resources that are listed here (“1” to “4”) are practical “hands-on” tools. Peel’s book is a classic and is used by many churches across the country in equipping their people for visitation. The book is written specifically for hospital visitors but has a much wider application. The principles stated twenty years ago are still fresh and relevant in the ministry today. Peel focuses on the importance of listening skills, being present for

²³¹ See pp. 188-189.

people, and the appropriate use of spiritual resources (i.e. prayer, scripture and worship). The *Joy of Caring* continues on this same theme and provides helpful overheads and training tools which encourages more class participation. The book by Piland, and the training course by Butcher, offer very helpful resources in approaching a variety of visitation situations. Both authors also provide rich resource materials for the teacher and the learner.

In his book, *Can The Pastor Do It Alone?*, Steinbron gives a convincing rationale for the role of the laity in the ministry of pastoral care in the local church. It is also a “how to” book in terms of developing and planning lay-pastoring program in the local church.

The final two suggested resources on the list are among the best in their special area of training. *Stephen Ministries* has a thorough training program for members of the local church who wish to become involved in counseling and care-giving ministries. The program has intensive training over a period of time and calls for long-term commitment. One Atlantic Baptist church used the program for a number of years and was able to develop a high level of care-giving. The workers were well trained in their ministry responsibility. The *Evangelism Explosion* visitation program also calls for a depth of commitment to training over time. This program was used by several churches but needed some cultural adaptation to the Canadian context.

iv. Visitation - A Healthy Environment

The leadership of the congregation is responsible for creating an atmosphere where people feel welcome, can experience meaningful worship, be nurtured in the faith, discover a caring fellowship, and be encouraged to serve. A healthy church environment communicates to new people that they are loved, not superficially, but in practical and profound ways. This kind of

church is open to different people with a variety of gifts and every effort will be made to help them “belong” and find “significance” (1 Cor. 12: 12-27). A healthy church communicates that a person’s spiritual needs will be taken seriously. People will be prayed for in times of spiritual crisis. The church will also be there to celebrate one’s spiritual victories.

A military officer who visited the church over a period of months shared with the leadership, that First Baptist Church, Dartmouth, had a weakness in its ministry “from the entrance to the pew”. The small entrance to the building provides little room for fostering fellowship or extending a greeting to visitors. Therefore, the church must be creative in helping new people who come to worship to connect with the larger congregation. The West Hill Park Baptist Church, Regina, provides a model of well trained greeters who know their congregation and serve consistently. The Regina program may be worth exploring as a means of strengthening this need in the Dartmouth church.

It is important to continue to develop ways of deepening relationships in the church. The visitation program becomes more effective when people are connected in a variety of ways through the life of the congregation. Most people leave a church because they have failed to develop meaningful friendships. Small groups, lunch hour visitation, dessert parties are just a few of the avenues that provide relationship bridges for people in the church. The strength of the pastoral care comes out of the connecting that happens in the small group ministries.

The atmosphere of caring can be enriched by simply keeping in touch with people. Often a brief phone call can be as meaningful and helpful as a planned visit. Included in the ministry of a healthy church are plenty of times to play together. The New Testament frequently reminds one that food and fellowship played a significant part of the personal and community life of Jesus

(Jn. 4:1-11; Lk.10:38-42; 5:29-35; 7:36-50: 19:1-10).

The breadth of welcome has been growing at First Baptist Church in Dartmouth. The addition of facilities for the physically challenged has opened the way for their participation. The development of a “food bank” has opened the doors to many of the marginalized of the community and provided an avenue of practical service for many within the congregation. A continuing development of nursery programs and upgraded facilities sends a message to young families that there is a welcome here.

The practical ministry of providing support to families celebrating anniversaries, weddings, and the provision of refreshments after funerals communicates a message to the community that the church is seeking to serve them in the name of Christ. Recognizing the abilities of others within the congregation, and the value of these diverse ministries in meeting different segments of the church and community, can continue to build a healthy environment where people are welcomed and Christ is glorified.

v. Visitation - An Adequate Structure

How can the visitation committee know when a family is expecting their first child? How are they informed that a member has experienced a serious loss? Paul wrote to church in Corinth “But everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way” (1 Cor. 14:40). It is important to keep the congregational records up-to-date. The motto of an American church is “We count people because people count.” The technology that is available to the church today makes this possible and necessary. Computers, computer programs, email and cell phones are a few of the technical tools that can improve the structures of a visitation program

In 1992, First Baptist Church made a major step towards the

implementation of a structure that could provide continuity to the visitation program. The employment of the “coordinator of ministries” staff position included in the job description four mandates: to (1) assist staff in coordinating visitation; (2) keep record of visits; (3) communicate congregational needs to staff; and (4) develop a ministry of “hospitality”.²³²

A church, like First Baptist, Dartmouth, with a congregation and mission community of nearly 600 families, is strengthened with a trained and equipped person doing this important task. The work is as much pastoral as it is administrative. Included in the creation of meaningful structures for visitation may be: (1) a systematic selection (recruitment) of visitors; (2) an update of homes in need of a pastoral visit (e.g. meeting crisis, awareness of new families, providing long term grief support) ; (3) visitation training programs developed for the workers (and people who might be considering this ministry); (4) celebration times for visitors (with acknowledgment before the congregation); (5) data base of referral resources for visitors (within both the congregation and community); and (6) sensitive communication of the visitation program within the congregation (customized and caring).

The structures need to be developed with a measure of flexibility that can match the needs of the congregation to the available resources. It is designed around people to monitor their progress, so they have meaningful responsibilities, and the necessary training and support. Structures are put in place to welcome people who come to the church and to assist the congregation to reach out to the world God has called them to serve. A system of connecting and communicating is created for members of the congregation who are away from the church (e.g. students in university, people who winter in warm climates, missionaries serving overseas, the incarcerated, etc). The

²³² See pp. 116-118.

structures are put in place to provide an atmosphere of genuine caring that brings health to the body of Christ and positive witness in the community. (Note forms in appendix D).

vi. Visitation - A Supportive Evaluation

The importance of an evaluation is not that it is critical but that it is constructive. C. Ellis Nelson writes, “The purpose of evaluation is not to prove but to improve.”²³³ It would be consequential to examine a number of areas influenced by the ministry of visitation at First Baptist Church, Dartmouth. The following topics could be inspected:

1. The role of leadership in the visitation program;
2. The impact the visitation experience has had on the visitors;
3. The consequence upon the homes that are visited;
4. The ownership of the program by the larger church community;
5. The level of cooperation between the clergy and laity;
6. The influence of cultural change upon the ministry of visitation;
7. The integration of the visitation ministry into the total program of the church;
8. The evidence of gaps in the pastoral needs of the church;
9. The effectiveness of the recruitment for this ministry;
10. The impact of the ministry on the growth of the church;
11. The ability to sustain a training program; and
12. The role of the program to enrich the spiritual life of the congregation.

Evaluation can help the church to review its goals to see if they have been realized. Hopefully, a careful evaluation will reveal the weaknesses in the program that can be worked at and reveal the successes that can be celebrated.

²³³ C. Ellis Nelson. Using Evaluation in Theological Education (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 1975), 39.

The evaluation process can revitalize the program of visitation and ignite a new enthusiasm among the pastoral staff and laity who participate.

The evaluation should include all those who have participated in the ministry of visitation (staff, administrator, deacons, visitors, visited). In order to provide continuity, there is merit in having the evaluation developed as a regularly scheduled process. The evaluation process needs to be tailor-made to fit the particular church and kept as simple as possible. First Baptist Church, Dartmouth, will benefit from establishing measurable goals, setting time lines, and providing the structures to make the dream of a sustainable visitation program a reality.

vii. Visitation - A Shared Ministry

Jethro visited his son-in-law Moses on one occasion and challenged him to take a careful look at his work ethic. Moses had responded to God's call and had been serving as judge over his people. The task had increased and Moses was working very long days. Carefully observing what was happening in the workplace Jethro said to Moses, "What you are doing is not good. You and these people who come to you will only wear yourselves out. The work is too heavy for you; you cannot handle it alone" (Ex. 18: 17-18). Jethro went on to share a plan of dividing the work load with other capable leaders. As a result, Moses was rescued from burnout and several of the potential leaders had the privilege of sharing in the service of God among their own people.

The writer concludes this list of recommendations by highlighting the importance of a continuing program of shared ministry in visitation at First Baptist Church, Dartmouth. This necessitates the selection, training and commissioning of lay people to work alongside the pastoral team. The words from *Pursuing Excellence in Ministry* points to the importance of this essential

partnership in serving Jesus Christ within the church:

Excellence in ministry is not a one-person show. Even with vigorous and dynamic pastoral leadership, long-term excellence in faithfully carrying out the mission of the Gospel occurs only where the laity are committed to the vision of what their congregation's ministry can be. In the excellent churches, the laity own, take responsibility for, and are trusted with carrying out the work of the people of God.²³⁴

The rediscovery of the gifts of the laity is one of the most valued treasures in the exercise of writing this thesis. Reviewing the notes taken over time and reflecting on the experiences of shared ministry has reminded the writer of the continuing contribution the laity make to the church's ministry. During the discussion time with the visitors who reported on their answers to the questionnaire, there was significant insight and spiritual depth to the responses they contributed. God had brought a number of them from the fringe of the church's life to become the most trusted and capable leaders in the present congregation. They truly are the laos, the transformed people of God (author's emphasis).

The answers on the questionnaire and following discussion by the visitors confirmed the belief of the writer that a shared ministry of visitation can build understanding and mutual respect between pastor and people. They discover and affirm each other's spiritual gifts. Together, they will rejoice and praise God that he has supplied more than was needed for work of his church.

It will be a time like the one recorded in Exodus:

Then Moses gave an order and they sent this word throughout the camp: "No man or woman is to make anything else as an offering for the sanctuary." And so the people were restrained from bringing more, because what they already had was more than enough to do all the work.²³⁵

²³⁴ Daniel V. Biles, *Pursuing Excellence in Ministry* (Washington: The Alban Institute, 1988), 9.

²³⁵ Ex. 36:6-7.

A pastor of a previous generation said, "It is not the work that I do that will kill me but the worry about the work that is still unfinished." R. Paul Stevens wrote a popular book under the title, *Liberating The Laity: Equipping All the Saints For Ministry*. The words on the cover, "because every church has far more work than any one person can do,"²³⁶ identify the reason for the writing of his book and address a real problem in the church. Stevens calls the church to support a shared ministry that will ease the pressure of pastoral ministry and bring new life to the laity. The primary task of the pastor is to "equip the laity". He strikes a balanced and hopeful cord when he writes in his preface:

"This does not mean the demotion of the pastor and the promotion of the so-called layperson. For through equipping, both pastor and layperson are restored to their proper dignity."²³⁷

Moses was not demoted when he shared the task of providing judgment in Israel. He was provided with a structure that set him free to do a better job. The joy of service was spread among the people and needs of the community were being met more effectively. The church in modern culture needs to recognize the significant role of the laity in meeting the call of Christ to "go and make disciples of all nations" (Mt. 28:20). The longing within Canadian society to understand mystery, develop real community and to find meaning in life will be met in greater measure as the church releases its laity to be salt (Mt. 5:13) and light (Mt. 5:14) in our world. The commission of Jesus Christ to go two by two can reflect wisdom as the church reaches out to our fallen culture. "Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their work: If one falls down, his friend can help him up. But pity the man who falls and has no one to help him up!" (Ecc. 4: 9-10).

²³⁶ Stevens, 1.

²³⁷ Stevens, 10.

The excitement of visiting together in the pastoral care of church members and outreach to new families can bring the same experience as it did in the time of Christ. Luke records "...the seventy-two returned with joy and said, 'Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name.'" (Lk.10:17). The reward becomes a collective experience in the life of the congregation as obedient workers become a channel of God's love in the church and in the community. The word of the prophet rings with new meaning as hearts and hands of pastor and people serve together in the cause of Christ, "Look at the nations, and watch - and be utterly amazed. For I am going to do something in your days that you would not believe even if you were told" (Hab.1:5).

In the world of athletics one hears from time to time about the "dream team". This is when a country brings together their best players in a particular sport and places them in a high level world competition. The purpose of assembling such a powerful team is to play the game with excellence and win a convincing victory. The time spent in research and the development of this thesis/project has challenged the writer to begin the process of moving from mediocrity to excellence. Christ called the church to enter into a world competition when he communicated from the mountain "go and make disciples of all nations"(Mt. 28:19).

The church that responds to the commission of Christ can begin to assemble a "dream team" of men and women who belong to Christ and have a burning desire to serve in the ministry of visitation. Research has revealed that many in the church respond to the call for service "when asked". People are selected for this team who are both able and available. Ordinary people, motivated by the desire to serve in the name of Christ and empowered by the Holy Spirit, will win victory after victory in the church's mission (Jn. 20:21). Three steps need to be taken to see the vision become a reality in the visitation

ministry of the local church.

First, there is a need to cast a clear vision of the significance of the ministry. The secret of the success of the visitation ministry in Westhill Park Baptist Church, Regina, was "extremely high degree of unity and commitment to a common goal".²³⁸ The positive response of people to the ministry of visitation in Dartmouth, and elsewhere, calls the leadership of the church to communicate a compelling vision of harvest opportunity (Mt. 9:37, Jn. 4:35, Gal. 6:9).

The communication of the values of visitation ministry is a significant part of developing the vision. Personal values in visitation abound, such as: 1) deepening of personal faith; 2) developing lasting friendships; 3) understanding pastoral ministry; 4) discovering one's spiritual gifts; 4) the joy of seeing the lost come to Christ; and 5) finding significance in Kingdom service, can be communicated.

People are further motivated to put visitation as a priority when they discover the value of this ministry within the church. Through the ministry of visitation church members observe: 1) people rejoicing in the discovery of a supportive community; 2) new people being spiritually nourished through meaningful worship; 3) a variety of spiritual gifts being discovered and developed; 4) celebration as people come to Christ and are welcomed into the fellowship; 5) a strengthening of the church's witness in the wider community; and 6) the thrill of watching new leadership develop as a result of faithful service. People are encouraged when they sense that their church is healthy and growing through dynamic outreach.

The challenge of leadership is to inspire the team by raising their sights to a common mission that will bring out their best. Daniel Brown says, "

²³⁸ Wells, 1.

Securing a vision is only half of an effective leader's task; equally important is communicating the vision in a compelling manner."²³⁹

The second part of the plan for a powerful ministry of visitation is the priority of training. If the writer was to begin again there would be a more intentional focus on discovery of the spiritual gifts of the laity and development of those gifts for ministry. The priority of the preparation is on people not on program. A significant part of this training is to help people recognize that their workplace is their mission field. Helping people to build bridges for Christ in the community where they live and work is an important aspect of the pastoral and evangelistic training. The research has also revealed an abundance of helpful human resources for equipping in visitation within the community. Often these same people are part of a community of faith. People want to serve, however they communicate clearly that they desire to be well trained for the task. Again, on-the-job training with careful mentoring has been the model most appreciated in the visitation program in Dartmouth and in other churches that were surveyed. People, like athletes, need adequate training to perform well "on the field". The placement of visitors needs careful planning. Training has little value if there is not an important place of service prepared for those who are trained.

Finally, the dream of having an effective and sustained visitation program calls for pastors and congregations to empower their laity in significant ministry tasks. Pastoral burnout is a common reality in our time. Often it relates to unrealistic expectations by the congregation and by the pastor as well. Jesus called his disciples, trained them, and empowered them to serve in his world mission (Acts 1:8). It is vital to the health and life of the church that its laity are engaged in mission today. During the preparation of

²³⁹Brown , 68.

this thesis the writer heard comments like: "only the inner circle are privileged to get visits" or "no one has been around to see us in the past two years." The problem of hurting church members, feeling marginalized or ignored, can be readily addressed by an empowered laity that is trained to do pastoral care and evangelism. Supporting this important ministry will be qualified leadership, adequate structures and a clearly defined timetable of activity. The task is overwhelming but the victory is assured (Jos. 1:1-5; Phil. 4:13). The Bible is filled with encouraging promises for empowered laity. In conclusion, we step into the future with these assurances:

But Moses said to the people, "Do not fear! Stand by and see the salvation of the Lord which he will accomplish for you today; for the Egyptians whom you have seen today, you will never see them again forever. The Lord will fight for you while you keep silent" (Ex. 14:13-14).

Yet those who wait for the Lord will gain new strength; they will mount up with wings like eagles, they will run and not get tired, they will walk and not become weary (Isa. 40:31).

But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord (1Cor. 15:57-58).

Chapter Six

SUGGESTED FURTHER RESEARCH

Research for a D.Min. thesis/project happens in the midst of the pressure of ministry. Time places limits on the depth of study that can be achieved. Therefore, a number of issues that are uncovered in the exploration of the subject are set aside for another project. There are also several aspects of visitation that have been examined in the thesis which warrant more in-depth research. If the writer were to add to this thesis, or begin a further study on the subject, the following are some of the primary areas of consideration.

A. TRAINING MANUAL

A visitation training manual for pastors is a possible next step in the development of this study. There is a need to develop training materials for teachers who train pastors to equip their laity in visitation (2 Tim. 2:2). The teaching material could be developed for denominational or seminary use, or for self study by the pastor in a local congregation. The manual would address a variety of areas in the ministry of visitation, including: overcoming personal barriers; working within congregation expectations; relating to cultural changes and developing the potential in the laity.

B. CODE OF ETHICS

An ethical code for visitation is an area of study to be developed. Visiting can place a worker in a volatile situation. There is greater concern today within the church and society about the ethics of those who serve as care-givers. Unfortunately, the occasion of moral failure among Christian

leaders has been on the rise.²⁴⁰ It is important for the church and the workers to provide safeguards against the risks of home visits (physical, moral and legal). In exploring this subject it would be helpful for the church to establish boundaries that are meaningful for the setting. Training on moral issues such as confidentiality and physical contact would be considered in the study.

The research would also include issues of accountability and support. Who determines the code of ethics that is used in the visitation program? It is based on both biblical and cultural principles? The text of this thesis touches on the training of the seventy-two by Jesus to visit in pairs (Luke 10:1-2). The Bible describes, in a number of places, the concept of ministry in teams (Mk. 6:7; Acts 3:1-10; Acts 15:40-41). These models of support and protection offered by the biblical accounts could be explored in greater depth and applied to ministry in today's context.

C. TRANSFERABILITY

Transferring the principles discovered in this study to another church context is worth further examination. The question of ministry to different cultures becomes an issue. In the anonymity of an urban church the selection of visitors would be different from a rural culture where people share a long and intimate history. At the same time, the importance of seeing this as a redemptive ministry and selecting people most gifted for the task are principles that would apply in any context. The program of lay pastoral care is built around a vision of the opportunity for ministry and recognizing the resources available.

²⁴⁰ James MacDonald, "5 Moral Fences", *Leadership*, 20.3 (1999), 45.

D. DEFINED VISITS

There are many reasons for making a visit on behalf of the church. The task of matching specific people to respond to different needs within the congregation is an important study. One visitor may handle a counseling situation with grace and strength. Someone else may have the gift of evangelism and minister effectively in that setting. Another person who has had a long history in the church may be the one to send to welcome a new family. It is important to be selective and intentional in planning the ministry of visitation. Knowing the visitors' strengths and limitations will make the program more effective and workers more fulfilled in their stewardship of time and energy.

E. URBAN CULTURE

Research has revealed that the urban church brings a new face to the ministry of visitation. Traditional expectations of the rural community are not found in the urban context. The ministry of visitation may seem like an intrusion into the lives of fellow church families. However, many are feeling alienated and marginalized within the urban migration. They, too, have high expectations of the church's pastoral care in times of personal crisis. The adaptation of the ministry of visitation to the multicultural urban setting is worthy of further research.

F. CLERGY BURNOUT

There is the tension that comes from responding to congregational expectations and at the same time seeking to meet the needs of the family. The question of caring for the care-giver surfaces in this discussion. One who pursues the ministry of visitation with passion must be aware of the need to be

supported in the process. Spiritual input is crucial to spiritual output. The message of Jethro to Moses puts this question into perspective (Ex. 18). The principles learned from a study of biblical and non-biblical sources would address a number of important questions related to sustainability and the spiritual health of the leadership. The relationship between spiritual health and motivation for visitation could be a worthwhile investigation.

G. RECRUITMENT

Over the years that young people have been involved in the ministry of visitation at First Baptist Church in Dartmouth, several have responded to God's call to a church vocation. During the thesis research a number were interviewed and twenty-five filled in questionnaires. In the view of the writer, a study of the value they place on the experience of visitation would provide important insights into the subject. How significant has this experience been in their choice of vocation? It would be interesting to explore how they view the mentoring model in their present ministry and its value for recruitment.

H. EVALUATION

The whole question of evaluation in the ministry programs of the church could be developed at greater depth. The significance of evaluation has been a lesson learned by the writer in the cultivation of this project. Seeing evaluation as an affirmation of the people who serve and as a catalyst to enrich the programs of the church is a motivation to further reflection. There are many areas that can be evaluated to strengthen the ministry. The leaders might inquire about the quality of the visitation training program. They could evaluate how clearly the value of the ministry is being communicated to the

congregation. They might ask if the systems that have been put in place will sustain the growth of the program.

I. CRISIS VISITATION

The questionnaires revealed that some visits were difficult to handle. People in the church sometimes experience severe loss (e.g. death of a child, loss of job, marriage failure). These serious counseling visits call for proper training and careful selection of visitors. There are many aspects of crisis visitation that would benefit from purposeful study. Often this aspect of visitation is fulfilled through building a long-term relationship. Patience and persistence is needed to see a person through the long process of grief recovery or conflict management. Further study might include sensitive interviews with people who have left the church over a period of years. Also, the study might consider looking at preventative as well as supportive and redemptive visits.

J. LAY PASTORS

The subject of this thesis raises a number of questions surrounding the ministry of laity in the church. How are the responsibilities of the clergy defined in a day when lay pasturing becomes more accepted? What are the limits, if any, of spiritual leadership of the laity? What structures will need to be changed in the church to allow for meaningful involvement by the laity? These and other questions can provide a helpful study of an important shift in the leadership of the contemporary church.

A cartoon that depicted the church as a slow moving wagon captured the writer.²⁴¹ People, in front and behind, are pictured attempting to move this awkward vehicle. The difficulty was that the wagon has square wheels.

²⁴¹ Christian A. Schwarz, Natural Church Development (Winfield: International Centre for Leadership Development & Evangelism, 1998), 128.

However, the issue could be quickly resolved if the round wheels that filled the wagon were put to use. Empowering the laity for a ministry of visitation will continue to be an exciting adventure in this time of cultural and ecclesiastical change. There are a multitude of issues to be explored, and recorded in print, for the growth of the church through a sustainable ministry of visitation. It is the writer's hope that these ten suggested areas will be a starting point for further study on this important subject.

APPENDICES

Appendix A

1. ATTITUDE TOWARD VISITATION QUESTIONNAIRE

The purpose of this questionnaire is to determine your feelings about making visits as a member of the visitation team of First Baptist Church. This exercise is to assist us in the improvement of the program of visitation and the pastoral care ministry of the church..

Part I: Please give the following personal information by checking the appropriate blank by each item.

1. Your sex: (11) Male (9) Female

2. Your age: (0) 13-17 (0) 18-24 (0) 25-29
 (0) 30-39 (5) 40-49 (15) 50 or older

3. How involved are you in the programs of the church?

 (11) Very involved (7) Somewhat involved
 (2) Slightly involved (0) Not involved

4. Check all of the following positions, which you hold or have held in the past:

 (7) Sunday school teacher (5) Youth leader
 (10) Deacon's board (1) choir
 (13) Church council (9) greeter/usher
 (7) Missions Committee (6) other

Part II: In each of the following, please circle the answer the best describes your own feelings and attitude. The following abbreviations are used:

SA - Strongly Agree A - Agree PA - Partially Agree
SD - Strongly Disagree D - Disagree PD - Partially Disagree

1. The main reason for a visitation program is to evangelize the lost.

SA	A	PA	PD	D	SD
0	3	8	1	7	1

2. A church visitation program should include visitation to the home bound (shut-ins)?

SA	A	PA	PD	D	SD
20	0	0	0	0	0

3. Visitation to church members in the hospital should be done only by the pastor.

SA	A	PA	PD	D	SD
1	0	0	0	14	5

4. It is important for inactive church members (those who rarely come to church) to be visited.

SA	A	PA	PD	D	SD
7	11	0	0	1	1

5. Every church member should be involved in some type of church-related visitation.

SA	A	PA	PD	D	SD
1	8	6	0	5	0

6. I feel uncomfortable visiting people whom I do not know.

SA	A	PA	PD	D	SD
1	5	5	2	5	2

7. I believe that a visit by the pastor means more than a visit by me.

SA	A	PA	PD	D	SD
7	9	0	0	4	0

8. We should not visit people who would not fit into our type of congregation.

SA	A	PA	PD	D	SD
0	0	1	1	9	9

9. Church visitation is just another church "program" that has no biblical basis.
- | SA | A | PA | PD | D | SD |
|----|---|----|----|---|----|
| 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 8 | 10 |
10. Every member should be concerned about the church's visitation program.
- | SA | A | PA | PD | D | SD |
|----|----|----|----|---|----|
| 5 | 12 | 1 | | 2 | |
11. Visiting inactive members should not be a top priority for the visitation program.
- | SA | A | PA | PD | D | SD |
|----|---|----|----|---|----|
| 1 | 4 | 8 | 1 | 6 | 0 |
12. I struggle to go out on a visit because of my shyness.
- | SA | A | PA | PD | D | SD |
|----|---|----|----|---|----|
| 1 | 3 | 9 | 1 | 6 | 0 |
13. I feel that every type of visitation is important (shut-ins, evangelistic, new members).
- | SA | A | PA | PD | D | SD |
|----|---|----|----|---|----|
| 15 | 4 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
14. The uncertainty about what will be expected during the visit creates fear in me.
- | SA | A | PA | PD | D | SD |
|----|---|----|----|---|----|
| 0 | 2 | 7 | 3 | 7 | 1 |
15. Visitation is a very satisfying and rewarding experience.
- | SA | A | PA | PD | D | SD |
|----|---|----|----|---|----|
| 9 | 8 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
16. Members and adherents (non members who participate in church activities) who have been bereaved should be visited periodically.
- | SA | A | PA | PD | D | SD |
|----|----|----|----|---|----|
| 8 | 12 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
17. My hesitancy to visit is in part due to a lack of sufficient training for the task.
- | SA | A | PA | PD | D | SD |
|----|---|----|----|---|----|
| 1 | 3 | 8 | 0 | 6 | 0 |

18. The pastor's leadership is important in the sustaining of a visitation program.

SA	A	PA	PD	D	SD
10	9	1	0	0	0

19. Visitation has helped me to grow as a Christian.

SA	A	PA	PD	D	SD
7	12	1	0	0	0

20. Visiting with the pastoral staff was important for building my confidence.

SA	A	PA	PD	D	SD
4	12	2	1	1	0

21. There should be on-going training opportunities for those who visit.

SA	A	PA	PD	D	SD
4	11	5	0	0	0

22. Scripture reading should be a part of every pastoral visit.

SA	A	PA	PD	D	SD
0	3	6	5	6	0

23. Prayer should be a part of every pastoral visit.

SA	A	PA	PD	D	SD
4	8	5	3	0	0

24. I encountered situations with which I was not trained to deal.

SA	A	PA	PD	D	SD
0	5	5	2	7	1

For the following questions please rank in order of importance (1-5/6):
1 being most important; 5/6 being the least important.

25. The elements that were most helpful in developing your visitation skills were:

- 5 Sermons on visitation
- 2 Training sessions
- 1 Going with someone who has experience
- 4 Reading literature of the subject
- 3 Prayer
- 6 Other _____

26. What most influenced me to visit for the church was:

- 3 Duty as a Christian
- 1 I was asked
- 2 Opportunity to minister to others
- 4 Desire to evangelize the lost
- 5 I felt guilty for not visiting
- 6 Other _____

27. The biggest obstacles to overcome in my visitation ministry were:

- 4 Fear of rejection
- 2 Time for the task
- 1 Concern about what to say
- 3 Personal shyness
- 5 Not a pastor
- 6 Other _____

28. I think the pastor should visit:
- 6 Active members
 - 1 The Sick in hospital
 - 3 People new to the church
 - 5 Non-Christians
 - 4 Inactive members
 - 2 The bereaved
29. I think non-pastoral members of the visitation committee should visit:
- 6 Active members
 - 3 The Sick in hospital
 - 1 People new to the church
 - 5 Non-Christians
 - 4 Inactive members
 - 2 The bereaved
30. The rewards I received from visitation are:
- 3 Deepening of my faith
 - 1 Building friendships
 - 5 People becoming Christians
 - 2 Strengthening of the church
 - 4 Better understanding of pastoral ministry
 - 6 Other _____

For the following questions please answer: - Yes - No - Not Sure

31. Did Jesus visit homes in Bible times and heal the sick?
Yes No Not Sure
20
32. Did Jesus visit homes in Bible times and teach truths about God?
Yes No Not Sure
20
33. Did Jesus visit homes in Bible times and challenge sinners to believe?
Yes No Not Sure
20
34. Did Jesus visit homes in Bible times and share in fellowship meals?
Yes No Not Sure
20
35. Did Jesus visit homes in Bible times and comfort the bereaved?
Yes No Not Sure
20
36. The Bible pictures God as one who consistently visits His people.
Yes No Not Sure
20

Please give brief answers to the following questions

1. Do you prefer to visit alone or with a support person?
2. What type of visitation do you prefer (evangelistic, hospital, new families, shut-ins)?
3. How has visitation impacted your understanding of Christian ministry?
4. Does your involvement in visitation change your view of the pastor's function in the church? Explain?
5. What did you personally gain from participation in the church's visitation program?
6. Some people find visitation difficult.
 - a. What were your greatest obstacles to effective visitation?
 - b. What obstacles have you overcome?
 - c. What continue to be your greatest obstacles?
7. Have you been involved in any training? What type of training would make the task of visitation more beneficial?
8. What kind of difficulties have you encountered during visitation for which you were not prepared?
9. Why should someone participate in the visitation of the church?

2. ATTITUDE TOWARDS VISITATION QUESTIONNAIRE

First Baptist Church, Dartmouth, N.S.

The purpose of this questionnaire is to look closely at your experience of the visit(s) made by a member(s) of the congregation from First Baptist Church. This exercise has two purposes:

1. It will assist me in the writing of a Doctorate of Ministry thesis for Acadia Divinity College on the subject of visitation in the local church.
2. Your contribution will assist us in the improvement of the program of visitation and the pastoral care ministry of the church.

Approximately twenty "visitors" from the church have filled in question forms about their participation in the visitation program. The last chapter of the thesis, which is now being written, evaluates the church's program of visitation and will include the results of the two questionnaires (visitors and visited). Your assistance as one who was "visited" is crucial! Please do not sign your name as all responses are anonymous and will be kept confidential. Thank you for your assistance.

Yours Sincerely,

David Watt

Part I: Please give the following personal information by checking the appropriate blank by each item.

1. Your sex: (19) Male (19) Female

2. Your age: (0) 13-17 (0) 18-24 (1) 25-29 (13) 30-39
(6) 40-49 (18) 50 or older

3. How involved are you in the programs of the church?
(5) Very involved (15) Somewhat involved
(6) Slightly involved (12) Not involved

4. Check all of the following positions, which you hold or have held in the past:
(9) Sunday School Teacher (9) Youth Leader
(3) Deacon's Board (6) Choir
(13) Church Council (25) Greeter/Usher
(13) Other (4) None

5. How long since you were visited by a member of the church's visitation program?
(16) less than six months (16) one to three years
(5) less than a year (1) over three years

6. How often do you attend worship services at First Baptist Church?
(22) most Sundays (5) special Sundays (eg Christmas)
(9) approximately once a month (2) not at all

7. How many times have you been visited in the past three years by a member of the church visitation committee?
(11) once (8) 4-6 times
(18) 2-3 times (5) more than 6

Part II: In each of the following, please circle the answer the best describes your own feelings and attitude. The following abbreviations are used:

SA - Strongly Agree A - Agree PA - Partially Agree
SD - Strongly Disagree D - Disagree PD - Partially Disagree

1. I would appreciate a visit from a member of the church at a time of bereavement.

SA	A	PA	PD	D	SD
26	9	3	0	0	0

2. I feel uncomfortable being visited by people from the church that I do not know.

SA	A	PA	PD	D	SD
2	9	11	3	11	2

3. A visit by the pastor means more to me than a visit by a member of the church.

SA	A	PA	PD	D	SD
6	8	10	1	6	7

4. I would welcome a prayer offered by the visitor from the church.

SA	A	PA	PD	D	SD
7	19	11	1	0	0

5. I struggle to welcome a church visitor because of my shyness.

SA	A	PA	PD	D	SD
1	3	4	3	18	9

6. Being visited by people from the church is a satisfying and rewarding experience.

SA	A	PA	PD	D	SD
8	17	11	1	1	0

7. I would appreciate the church member reading a Bible passage during the visit.

SA	A	PA	PD	D	SD
4	8	16	3	5	2

8. Visits from the visitation committee should provide information about the church.

SA	A	PA	PD	D	SD
6	12	10	3	5	2

9. I experienced some anxiety not knowing what was expected of me during the visit.
- | SA | A | PA | PD | D | SD |
|----|---|----|----|----|----|
| 0 | 4 | 12 | 4 | 12 | 6 |
10. A busy schedule makes it difficult for me to host visitors from the church.
- | SA | A | PA | PD | D | SD |
|----|----|----|----|---|----|
| 1 | 10 | 12 | 3 | 9 | 3 |
11. I found the conversation during the visit too serious.
- | SA | A | PA | PD | D | SD |
|----|---|----|----|----|----|
| 0 | 1 | 2 | 6 | 21 | 8 |
12. People from the church's visitation committee don't visit me enough.
- | SA | A | PA | PD | D | SD |
|----|---|----|----|----|----|
| 0 | 5 | 9 | 2 | 19 | 3 |
13. I was not comfortable with the direction of the conversation during the visit.
- | SA | A | PA | PD | D | SD |
|----|---|----|----|----|----|
| 0 | 1 | 0 | 4 | 25 | 8 |
14. A visit from the church member brings excitement to my day.
- | SA | A | PA | PD | D | SD |
|----|---|----|----|----|----|
| 0 | 1 | 0 | 3 | 25 | 8 |
15. I don't think that the visitor from the church really cared about me.
- | SA | A | PA | PD | D | SD |
|----|---|----|----|----|----|
| 2 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 20 | 12 |
16. A visitor from the church has helped me to work through a personal struggle.
- | SA | A | PA | PD | D | SD |
|----|---|----|----|---|----|
| 5 | 9 | 9 | 5 | 7 | 2 |
17. I felt that the church had an interest in me when the visitor made his/her visit.
- | SA | A | PA | PD | D | SD |
|----|----|----|----|---|----|
| 17 | 12 | 5 | 3 | 1 | 0 |

18. I became more interested in serving the Lord after the visit from the church member.
- | SA | A | PA | PD | D | SD |
|----|---|----|----|---|----|
| 0 | 8 | 15 | 5 | 6 | 4 |
19. I feel that I have made some friends at the church since they visited my home.
- | SA | A | PA | PD | D | SD |
|----|----|----|----|---|----|
| 1 | 14 | 12 | 1 | 7 | 2 |
20. Because of the last visit I would like to have someone from the church visit me again.
- | SA | A | PA | PD | D | SD |
|----|----|----|----|---|----|
| 2 | 19 | 13 | 3 | 1 | 0 |
21. I would be uncomfortable having someone from the church drop in unannounced.
- | SA | A | PA | PD | D | SD |
|----|---|----|----|----|----|
| 2 | 7 | 12 | 4 | 10 | 3 |
22. The length of the visit by the church member was appropriate.
- | SA | A | PA | PD | D | SD |
|----|----|----|----|---|----|
| 1 | 33 | 4 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
23. I believe the church visitors are following Jesus' example when they do home visits.
- | SA | A | PA | PD | D | SD |
|----|----|----|----|---|----|
| 3 | 30 | 4 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
24. I appreciate the church visitor phoning ahead to set the date and time of a visit.
- | SA | A | PA | PD | D | SD |
|----|----|----|----|---|----|
| 10 | 24 | 3 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
25. In a crisis I would rather have the pastor visit me than a church member.
- | SA | A | PA | PD | D | SD |
|----|----|----|----|---|----|
| 9 | 18 | 5 | 4 | 2 | 0 |
26. I feel that the visit from the church member has been an encouragement to my faith.
- | SA | A | PA | PD | D | SD |
|----|----|----|----|---|----|
| 3 | 22 | 10 | 0 | 3 | 0 |

27. I would appreciate a visit from a church member if I was sick in hospital.
- | SA | A | PA | PD | D | SD |
|----|----|----|----|---|----|
| 12 | 20 | 4 | 0 | 3 | 0 |
28. My preference is that the visitor comes alone rather than with someone.
- | SA | A | PA | PD | D | SD |
|----|---|----|----|----|----|
| 1 | 6 | 13 | 4 | 12 | 2 |
29. I feel somewhat forgotten since the church visitor has not returned for some time.
- | SA | A | PA | PD | D | SD |
|----|---|----|----|----|----|
| 1 | 3 | 4 | 3 | 24 | 3 |
30. I see home visits by church members as a blessing to me.
- | SA | A | PA | PD | D | SD |
|----|----|----|----|---|----|
| 3 | 19 | 13 | 1 | 2 | 0 |
31. I feel that I can call on a visitor from the church in a time of great need.
- | SA | A | PA | PD | D | SD |
|----|----|----|----|---|----|
| 9 | 17 | 10 | 0 | 2 | 0 |
32. The church is strengthened when members are helping the pastors with visitation.
- | SA | A | PA | PD | D | SD |
|----|----|----|----|---|----|
| 14 | 18 | 6 | 0 | 1 | 0 |

Appendix B

RESOURCES FOR LAY VISITORS

1. Arn, Win. The Pastor's Manual For Effective Ministry . Monrovia: Church Growth, Inc., 1990.
2. Bryan, Dawson C., ed. They Went Forth Two by Two: A Plan For Witnessing To People For Christ. Nashville: Tidings, no date.
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8. Harpell, Brian H. Employing Spiritual Gifts For Church Growth. Ashland: Ashland Theological Seminary, 1982.
9. Huggett, Joyce Listening to Others. London: Hodder Christian Paperback, 1988.
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11. Peel, Donald. The Ministry of Listening, Team Visiting in Hospital and Home Toronto: The Anglican Book Center, 1980.

12. Savage, John S. and Joyce C. Nelson. Skills for Calling and Caring Ministries Learning the Language of Healing. Pittsford: L.E.A.D. Consultants, Inc., 1979.
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15. Weatherby, Robert L. Disciple-Making In the Local Church, M.Div. Thesis. Wolfville, N.S., 1980,
16. Equipping Deacons As Servant Leaders .Vol. 2. Baptist Sunday School Board Southern Baptist Convention. (Video Series).
17. Congregation Based Training Manual. Staff of Congregation based Training Program St. Thomas the Apostle Seminary and St. John Vianney Church, Kenmore, Washington, 1978.
18. Haugk, Kenneth C. Stephen Ministries. St. Louis, 1990.
19. Visitation Evangelism Manual. New York: Department of Evangelism, National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A.
20. Kennedy, James. Evangelism Explosion. Wheaton: Tyndale House, 1977.

Appendix C

MENTORING MODEL

Supervision of Visitation

Visitation is often one area of pastoral work that the student needs the most help to develop. Many students are uncertain about how to make a pastoral call. The pastor-supervisor can be of great assistance by taking the student with him on certain visits. It provides the student with a pastoral model and an opportunity to "practice" ministry under supervision. Making calls together provides the congregation with pastoral care and gives the student a clinical learning experience.

The pastor-supervisor and the student should spend sufficient time before the call to become familiar with the circumstances that may be encountered in the call. Basic information about the person and the family is important. What is the purpose of the call? What goals does the pastor and/or student have? What is the relationship the family has with the church? What difficulties can be anticipated? What issues may be raised?

Following the call, time should be spent in evaluation. Were the goals met? If so, how and why? If not, why not? What significant theological issues were raised during the call? How can the family be helped in subsequent visits? Is there any immediate action that needs to be taken?

In the initial calls the pastor offers himself as a model for the student. He takes the lead in the call and the student serves primarily in an observer role. The student is responsive and communicative, but for the most part watches the pastor function during the visit. The student takes mental notes on what is happening, formulating questions and observations that he can use during the evaluation period that follows the call. This can be a valuable learning experience for the supervisor as well as the student.

After a few visits have been made the supervisor chooses a call in which the student can take the lead. The pastor has the dual responsibility of

providing a meaningful experience for the student but also to provide adequate pastoral care for the parishioners. The student must have a measure of freedom, so that he can learn from his success and his failures. While the parishioner must be protected from inept or inappropriate pastoral care, the risk must be taken in order to meet the need for experience that will provide growth for the student.

If either the student or parishioner(s) are over-protected neither will benefit from the experience. Skill and sensitivity on the part of the pastor-supervisor is important through this encounter. The pastor should be open to recognize his mistakes and the student should be sensitive to the pastor's need for sensitivity and support throughout the visit.

Appendix D

PRACTICAL VISITATION POINTS

- 1) Do not act, lie or be phony. Be genuine.
- 2) Do not give medical advice. You are not there to diagnose or give your version of their illness. Listen attentively to their fears and concerns of their illness. But do not advise.
- 3) Don't let moral faults which you can do nothing about repel you. Do not judge. Are you aware of your own prejudice?
- 4) Limit a home visit to 45 minutes to one hour maximum. Hospital visits should be shorter in duration. Be aware of non verbal cues that the person is ready for you to leave.
- 5) Please refrain from wearing perfumes as many people are allergic or sensitive to scents.
- 6) Be prompt. Try also not to be early as the person may be unprepared.
- 7) Don't over sympathize. Express your sympathy and quietly listen to their story.
- 8) Avoid raising depressing or alarming topics, like bad news items or your own troubles. Let the patient, however, talk about their troubles freely.
- 9) Do not sit on the bed of a bed ridden person. You may jar or hurt him/her. Besides that is one bit of territory he/she has. Please respect it.
- 10) Do not apologize for your own deficiencies. This may make the person uncomfortable and it may require a difficult answer.
- 11) If the person has doubts about their medical or legal counsel have them talk to the professional concerned.
- 12) In your mind focus on the person's likable characteristics especially if they are obnoxious.

13) Avoid being baited into an argument or gossip. Do more listening than talking.

14) Parish news is OK but not parish gossip.

15) Focus on the person you are visiting, not yourself. Help them to share their feelings or experiences with you.

16) Remember that you are representing the church and God. Do all things pleasing unto God.

Appendix E

Visitation Record Forms

Following your first visit, please bring this sheet to next regular deacons' meeting

Initial Contact Report

First Telephone Call

Spoke to whom?	
Visit scheduled?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Date	
Do I need to contact Ted?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No

The First Visit

Date of Visit		1999
Partner (?)	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	
Any Concerns *		
Do I need to contact Ted?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	

* remember wise confidentiality

Record of Pastoral Telephone Calls

Date	Name	Telephone Number	Comments

Visiting Program – Numbers Summary

Team...	# Deacons Assigned ...	"Regular households"	Potential Visitors/household s...	Total households ...		
Seniors Team		76	15	= 91	Do not reorganize?	CAJ?
Single & 40+ Team	4?	57	12	= 69		TN?
Young& Single Team	↓	10	4	= 14		WW?
Young Married Team	2?	13	4 X 2 = 8	= 17		TN?
Married w/kids Team	4?	59	20 X 2 = 40	= 79		CAJ?
Married, Mature Team	4?	50	20 X 2 = 40	= 70		JP?
		265	~ 119	340		
X Seniors...		208	~ 104			
Affiliates Team	6?	250				TN?
	20			= 590		

Week of: _____

Pastor's Weekly Visitation

Date	Name	Illness	Death	Crisis	Counselling	Routine	Remarks

Hospital Calls

Date	Name	Hospital	Remarks

New Contacts / New Families

Date	Name	Address	Telephone	Family Members	Ages	Remarks

Pastor's Signature: _____

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