



## Diocese of Monmouth · Esgobaeth Mynwy

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# Pastoral Assistant

Session 5 – Group Course

*Material adapted from 'Living and Learning: Pastoral Visiting'  
published by St Padarn's Institute.*

# Session 5: Undertaking a visit

## Introductory Reading

You will be asked to undertake your visits on behalf of the local church. Some of those you visit may be members of the church and some may have little or no connection with the faith at all. Either way you are representatives of the Christian faith and have undertaken a visit because you are obeying a call to care for people as Christ cares. Some may wish to talk about their faith but others may not. In truth, the person that you are visiting may have a very different perspective and understanding about God and the church. Inevitably this is because everybody has different experiences of the presence of God in their lives.

Therefore it is possible that those you visit may want to know about your own faith. As a consequence, it is important that you are prepared to talk about your faith and how you understand the Bible, the church, the salvation that God brings through Jesus Christ, and what this has meant for you in your life. Although it is not appropriate for any of us to appear to have all the answers, it is important that Pastoral Assistants are honest about their faith and the limitations of their knowledge and experience and to have the confidence to say 'I don't know, but will try and find an answer'. Indeed, it is far better to acknowledge that you do not know the answer to a question than to attempt to answer incorrectly! It is also important that the views of those who are visited are respected.

We are all called to be in relationship with God which means that we need words and images through which this relationship can grow and develop. Because we are all unique, and because our faith has been shaped by our particular journey through life, this will have an effect on the ways in which we understand God and the words we use to describe that experience. It is therefore important for every Pastoral Assistant to reflect on their own life of faith and to explore the ways in which they can describe their relationship with God and explain why they want to visit others in Christ's name.

It is of course a natural part of our life of faith to come before God in quietness and prayer, to converse and bring before God all that concerns us and all that is important to us. We gather corporately as Christian community to meet with God and to pray. It would therefore be natural to us to hold those we visit in our prayers, to pray before we visit them, to keep them in our prayers after the visit is over, and with their permission, to pray for them in Sunday worship. However, it is less clear whether we should pray with a person on a visit.



There are three options:

1. If you feel comfortable and confident enough, and the person you visit agrees, then offer a prayer aloud, a prayer that you have taken with you, or a prayer in your own words. Use either a general all-purpose prayer or one that brings to God names and issues that have been discussed. It is good to keep it short.
2. Offer a moment of silence for each of you to pray for each other and all that has been discussed. This is sometimes best done in quietness without using any spoken words. Agree to bring the quiet prayer to end by saying 'Amen'. Keep the time of silence short so that it doesn't become uncomfortable.
3. You might like to leave a prayer on a card, and ask the person if they would like to use the prayer after you have left and that you will offer a prayer for them once you get back home.

Each ministry area will organise its visiting in a different way. Ideally you will be part of a visiting team that will meet together regularly to pray and to share experiences and issues. This will also be a place where you can find mutual support and encouragement. You may find that there is no team of visitors and that it is a member of the clergy team or LLM who asks you to undertake certain visits. If you have a team of Assistants it may be that the visits are organised by a lay team leader. Either way, practicalities are important.

The following points need consideration.

1. Each visit will almost certainly come from, or be connected to your own ministry area. However, if the person lives outside your parish it is accepted practice to inform the vicar of the parish in which you will undertake your visit, and the reasons for doing so.
2. Try to determine if this is a visit you feel safe undertaking alone, or whether it is better to meet in a public place or to take someone else with you or arrange to visit when a family member or professional person, such as a support worker, is present. Never put yourself in a vulnerable position.
3. If you are asked to undertake a visit, be certain of the time available to you. If you don't have the time to undertake the visit, it is better to say so and avoid difficulties at a later stage.



4. If at all possible arrange the visit by phone. Make sure to be punctual.
5. When you visit ensure the person you are visiting knows how long you can stay. Those who are ill or unwell will probably appreciate a shorter rather than a longer visit.
6. Make sure that you have an ID card (with a photograph, the name of the church and/or ministry area, and a contact phone number) giving authorisation (usually from the Ministry Area Leader) signed by you and them.
7. Always make a note of the date, time, place and person visited.
8. Never give out your home phone number or address unless it is to someone you know well and trust.
9. Do not agree to visit the person again unless you are able to keep the arrangement. Be aware that lonely people can be very demanding.
10. Confidentiality is important. Never talk about the person you have visited. If you feel it is necessary, ask the person you visit if they will give you permission to tell another person about their situation.
11. If visiting a care home, do not forget to sign in and out and be courteous to staff at all times.
12. If visiting a hospital, make sure you inform the Hospital Chaplain that you intend to visit, always observe visiting hours and check with the nurse in charge it is ok to visit. Observe all infection control measures including sanitising your hands before and after each visit, and never sitting on the bed.

Most importantly of all, know your limitations and keep appropriate boundaries. Do not allow people to become too dependent on you as a Pastoral Assistant. Be clear what you are able to offer and what is beyond your competence.

In truth, most visits are happy, comfortable occasions when everybody feels safe. However, it is important to recognise that visitors are vulnerable. It is important to let a third party know where you are going and how long you expect to take over the visit. In the house, identify the exits and make a quick risk assessment of any dangers to your person. Keep your keys with you and where possible carry a mobile phone.



If you do not know the person you are visiting, try to find out as much as you can about their history and state of mind.

It is also important that you are fully aware of safeguarding issues. Safeguarding is about the prevention of the abuse of children and vulnerable adults. The ecumenical church's 'Forum for Safeguarding' has adopted the following definition of a vulnerable adult as being one who may be at risk and in need as a result of:

- sensory impairment;
- a learning disability;
- a physical illness;
- a mental illness, chronic or otherwise, including dementia or addiction to alcohol or drugs;
- a reduction in physical, mental or emotional capacity or, who has for any reason become unable to protect him or herself from significant harm or exploitation.

It is clear that many of the adults that a visitor will encounter are in this category. Indeed all of us can be vulnerable at different times. Also, if you are asked to visit a family with children, you may be confronted with a situation where you feel it is possible that a child is suffering abuse. If you are concerned following a visit that a child or a vulnerable adult may be suffering abuse it is important that you:

- do not delay reporting your concerns;
- do not attempt to investigate for yourself the truth of any allegations, only report them on;
- do not contact the alleged abuser;
- consult with the Provincial Safeguarding Officer for our diocese, who will log your concerns and instruct you in the next steps.

It is vitally important that you are familiar with the Church in Wales Safeguarding Policy. Alongside this training, you should have both completed a safe recruitment process within your ministry area and undertaken the full Church in Wales Safeguarding Training, before you are commissioned and/or make any pastoral visits on your own.



## Group Work Discussion

### 1. Gathering

Spend a few minutes in silence, offering any worries or concerns from everyday life to God, and acknowledging God's presence among you as you meet together.

**Almighty and everlasting God,  
who in your tender love towards the human race  
sent your Son our Saviour Jesus Christ  
to take upon him our flesh  
and to suffer death upon the cross:  
grant that we may follow the example of his patience and humility,  
and also be made partakers of his resurrection;  
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,  
who is alive and reigns with you,  
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
one God, now and for ever.  
Amen.**

### 2. Reflecting

As a group, read and discuss this scenario:

*A Pastoral Assistant has called to see an elderly member of the church who has just moved into a nursing home following a fall. The visit takes place in the home's day room. At the end of the visit, having listened to the parishioner's concerns and experiences, the Pastoral Assistant asks "Would you like me to pray with you now, or to light a candle for you in church or to remember you in the intercessions on Sunday?"*

- Why might the Pastoral Assistant have asked this question in this way?
- Why might a person choose, and not choose, each of the options for prayer offered?
- What might be the content of your prayer in each case and where might you find appropriate resources?



### 3. Exploring

Discuss together as a group:

- What practical arrangements do you need to make before undertaking a pastoral visit?
- What practical steps should you will take to ensure your own safety while pastoral visiting?
- Examine the safeguarding and vulnerable adult protection procedures that are in place in your ministry area.
- Determine the practical arrangements that need to be in place to ensure that you are able to respond to any pastoral situation you may encounter.

### 4. Responding and Concluding

Over the next three months, you will begin to undertake pastoral visiting in your ministry area on a probationary basis:

- Ideally, your first few visits should be accompanied by a priest, licensed minister or other experienced Pastoral Assistant. Make plans to enable these visits to happen.
- Schedule the date for your final follow up session in three months' time, when you will reflect on your initial experience and discuss the final steps to full commissioned ministry.

Before you finish:

- a. Each share briefly one particular thing you have learned in this session.
- b. Finish by saying the Grace together, or some other form of prayer.

