

# Using Visitation with New Members

John D. Duncan

Why should deacons devote time to visiting new church members instead of visiting prospects? Deacons, as leaders, must recognize the importance of helping assimilate new members into the church. By helping them settle into their new church family, you will be encouraging them, equipping them for service and strengthening the body of Christ. Here are some reasons why you should participate in deacon visitation:

## **You and your pastor will be ministering together.**

Ministering with your pastor is key to your role as a deacon. Deacon visitation takes ministry out of the hands of one (the pastor) and shares it with many (deacons). Deacon visitation, while not glamorous, allows you to minister with your pastor. Such cooperative service honors Christ.

Deacon ministry to new members invites you to partake in the spiritual growth of the church. It sends you into homes. Visitation allows you to contribute to the spiritual growth of new members. Your involvement breaks barriers of professionalism and chips away at the idea that it's the preacher's job to do the church's ministry. A church that relies on the church staff for all personal contact and spiritual growth is a church that limits God's power. When deacons serve, the potential for God's work through the church expands.

## **You will be able to get acquainted with your church's newest members.**

Another reason for visitation is the privilege of becoming acquainted with new members. When people join your church, they often feel disjointed, having many questions and perhaps knowing only a few people in the church. Visitation creates the space to get acquainted. It provides an informal atmosphere to welcome them to the church fellowship. It produces a forum for responding to questions. The visit entertains the possibility of learning about a person's spiritual gifts or past leadership responsibilities.

Getting to know new members also affords you the chance to learn about what their needs are. Finding ways a new member might contribute to the church becomes secondary to discovering needs. A visit into a new member's home exposes needs. A deacon recently visited a new member in our church only to find her roof leaking inside her mobile home. The deacon initiated and planned to repair the roof. He contacted ministry teams to join the project. The elderly lady's roof stopped leaking, thanks to a personal visit and a plan of action.

Discovering needs demands sensitivity. Are the needs material emotional or spiritual? Deacon visitation sends the deacon on a missionary journey into the home of the new member to discover ways the deacon can minister. Deacons who minister do

so with open hearts, open eyes and open hands.

By having and sharing information about your church, you will make yourself a resource for new and potential members. What time does church start? Does the church have two worship services? What age groups exist for Bible study? Does the church have a strong youth ministry? When does the choir rehearse? How can I give money to the church? Is the church in a building program? What is the Cooperative Program? Who is my deacon? What is a deacon?

As a resource, deacons make themselves available and answer questions. A deacon cannot answer every question, but gaining knowledge about the church proves essential. How embarrassing for the deacon to know absolutely nothing about the church he serves! A packet of general information about the church can be left in the home of the one visited. These information packets describe church programs and ministries. Visitation informs the new member.

The deacon visit provides the first step in assimilating the new member into the church ministry. How many times has someone joined your church only to attend for several Sundays then disappear? How many join the church only to become spectators? Assimilation means leading new members to become regular attendees who participate in the church's ministry. They grow spiritually and join God in His work.

Two directions divide an approach to a visit here. One, a new believer must be affirmed and started on the road to maturity. A "survival kit" describes the first steps of walking with Christ. Putting the kit into the hand of the new believer is essential. Explaining the kit's format gently leads the new believer to take those first steps. It also gives encouragement for the early days of Christian growth.

Second, for an experienced believer, the visit moves toward serving Christ. Assimilating new members into the church means supplying basic church information so they can participate in the church's programs and ministries.

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