



part 1 of 4—

How to Develop an Effective Visitation Ministry

Follow-up is one of the most important ministries in the church and is by far one of the most neglected of all ministries in churches today.

When you read in Acts and the Epistles, you will see one of the most extensive visitation and follow-up ministries on earth. Paul and the apostles returned to the churches they established and left lay leaders in their place.

Follow-up is no more than relationship building. This is a priority for effective ministry. Develop a personal relationship with the children you teach. It is not enough to merely deliver lessons. Your kids need to see the Bible truths that you are talking about put into action. They need to see the lesson truths alive in your life.

Visitation

What is visitation? It is a program of going to the children's homes and getting to know them and the challenges and joys in their lives. It is devel-

oping a relationship with the children and allowing them to see Jesus through you.

Visitation is accomplished with a team of people who have a passion for helping this generation and who are willing to be committed.



Look for people who are willing to care for kids with genuine involvement.

Map It Out

Determine the local areas your ministry needs to visit, and map out those neighborhoods. You should have the address for each child that already forms part of your kids' church. Divide the visitation areas among your team members.

Visit Churched Kids

Each child who attends your kids' church should be visited each week. The actual visit can be a simple reminder of what is going on in kids' church that week and a sincere query on how the child and his/her family is doing. Most of the time, the children (or the parent)

will respond by saying that everything is fine. However, as the relationship and trust begin to grow, you will get responses that reflect the real needs of the family.

Visitation is an opportunity to be a prayer partner for sicknesses, school problems, heartaches, and frustrations. It is meeting needs not only as a Christian but also as a trusted friend. Most visitations are short, one-minute stops, but you will sometimes have occasion to spend more time when a family opens up and has specific needs.

You do not have to know all the problems and solve them during one visit. This is weekly visitation; you will have many opportunities to do more.

Invite New Kids

Use visitation to invite new kids to come to your kids' church. Get to know the people of the neighborhood. Doing so provides an excellent opportunity to be a witness. When you see your "regulars" playing with their friends, get to know those kids and invite them to the next kids' church service. They will be open to coming to church with their friends.

Make sure that you introduce yourself to the prospective visitor's parents, and explain to them who you are. Visitation becomes an outreach as you meet the other people in the neighborhood.

Encourage Your Team

Finally, encourage the visitation team members. Visitation can be tiring, lonely, and discouraging, so you need to build

them up. Share testimonies of what is happening as a result of the visitation team's efforts. Let the members know that they are fulfilling one of the most important jobs in the church. Keep the team moving forward with a positive outlook as you serve Jesus together.

Questions for Further Study—

1. What is the importance of visitation and follow-up?
2. What procedure do you have in place for following up on children who visit your church? What improvements can be made?
3. If you minister in a large church, list the names of some people you can approach who might be willing to help in your visitation ministry.



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How to Develop an Effective Visitation Ministry

Visitation As Soul Winning

Something amazing will happen as you get to know the children and they get to know Jesus. They will begin to change. It may not be noticeable at first, but soon the change will become more evident. You will find that because you've built a relationship with their families, parents will open up to you. They will tell you about the good changes they see in their kids.

Soul-winning is gratifying. It is even more fulfilling when families are coming to you to tell you about changes they see in their kids. Make a point of stimulating their interest in their kids by talking about the good things you have seen. Explain to them what Jesus can do to a person's life. Invite them to find out for themselves. Pray for them right there if they are open to it. Invite and welcome them to church.

You can also "prime the pump" by asking them if they have noticed changes in their children or if they are pleased with the kids' church program. These conversational questions will open the door in a

nonthreatening way. Then you will have an opportunity to talk about the things of God. Be patient if they do not open up. There is no need to force the situation.



Trust God, and remember you will be back next week. Allow those you visit to see something in your personality and your love for the children that will make them want to know more. Ask God to guide you and to give you courage over any fears as well. Let the smile in

your heart overcome any obstacles.

During visitation, if a child is sick pray for him or her. It is an open door. Ask the family to turn off the television and try to minimize any other distraction. Ask everyone to gather around as you lead them in prayer. Trust God to heal the child, and let His power be a witness to the others.

Flyers Open the Door

Flyers are like keys that unlock doors. They provide a way into the homes of the children you want to reach. You cannot exactly knock on somebody's door and ask him if you can build a relationship. You need an excuse to knock on a person's door. Giving a child a flyer gives you a reason to be there.

Pictures are vital, since kids may not be able to read. Everyone responds to visuals. Picture what you are promoting. Purchase additional clipart resources, or review other printed materials for ideas.

Next, promote with words such as, "Everyone who comes to Kids Church this Sunday will receive...." Make it professional with clean typeset (never handwritten) to create a good impres-

sion for your church.

It's important to include your church's name, address, and phone number on every flyer you produce. This builds confidence for parents and gives them a reference, should they have any questions or concerns.

Use the flyer to minister and

teach by including the Scripture Memory Verse for the upcoming week. There are countless testimonies of how including the Scripture has ministered to the parents as they read the flyer.

Proof the master copy with your helpers. You can cut paper and machine expenses by mak-

ing two half-size flyers on a page and then cutting them. Making three, which look like big tickets, will further cut costs.

Keep your flyers exciting. Remember, you are building a powerful and exciting children's ministry. Let your invitations express that.

Questions for Further Study—

1. What should you do if the people in a home you visit are not open to receiving the gospel message?
2. How can you show compassion to the people you visit whom you have never met before?
3. If you have never before used flyers in a visitation ministry, begin now to create them. Make a list of people who could help: those with writing and/or editing skills, those with art/design skills, and those who might have contacts with printing companies, or who would be willing to introduce themselves to printing companies and be a liaison.



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How to Develop an Effective Visitation Ministry

The Power of Personal Visitation

I'm sure the lack of visitation programs in most churches is not without justifiable reasoning. As modern-day evangelicals, we can justify most anything we want to if we work at it long enough. But the fact remains that the New Testament church went daily from house to house. I still believe we must go out and compel folks to come in. That word *compel* means to provide a way—*any* way.

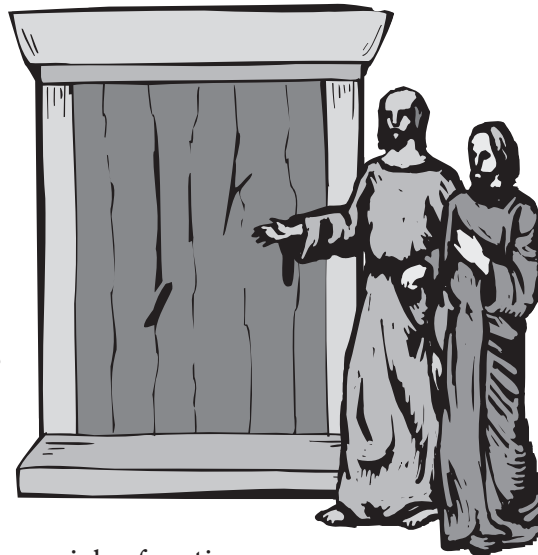
Unless we are on the field on a perpetual basis, I do not believe we can expect to build the kind of relationships it takes in today's world to influence a generation for Christ. And that's precisely what we are trying to do.

Why Does a Consistent Visitation Program Work?

Personal Visitation Places You Outside of Your Comfort Zone

Personal visitation places people (both paid and volunteer)

in someone else's world. Because of the nature and composition of our society, few average, middle-class Christians make a concerted effort to enter the world of a child, teenager, or adult outside their own families. It's a lot easier to go month after month locked in our own worlds, our lives revolving around families,



jobs, free time and personal comfort. When we step out of that comfort zone and go into someone else's world—a world that may be foreign—it can and will be uncomfortable.

Sometimes, breaking out of the comfort zone puts us into an unfamiliar social stratum. For

a number of reasons, it's easier to associate with the people with whom we feel comfortable. That's why most people have friends who think that everyone is just like them—when nothing could be further from the truth.

Getting into the reality of ghetto families with problems too mind-boggling to describe forces us to be real. It forces us to face issues and challenges that most Christians have never had to face.

Personal Visitation Produces Relationships

Personal visitation provides a person-to-person relationship. In the average church the actual time of ministry is extremely limited according to the schedule of the week. One of the beauties of the small-group concept is that it allows closer interaction with folks outside of a large congregational setting. Personal visitation does the same thing.

Each week we should spend several hours visiting the kids who visit our kids' church or Sidewalk Sunday School. The kids should eagerly look forward to us coming around. It

should be the highlight of their week—and the highlight of our ministry.

Yes, it is important that we prepare the lesson that we teach. Yes, the content of that lesson is important. Yes, the organization of the entire outreach is crucial. But, again, if people don't like

me, they won't listen to me. This is one of the most difficult things for so many Christian leaders to understand. If kids know me and like me, then they will listen to me.

I understand what's happening in the lives of the kids I visit. I'm in their homes every week.

I know their moms. (Few have dads.) I know the struggles they are going through in school. I know the struggles their moms are going through. Such relationships could not be built if it were not for the person-to-person contact we have during the week.

Questions for Further Study—

1. What are the important points of creating a *successful* visitation ministry?

2. Why is it important to foster relationships during personal visitation?



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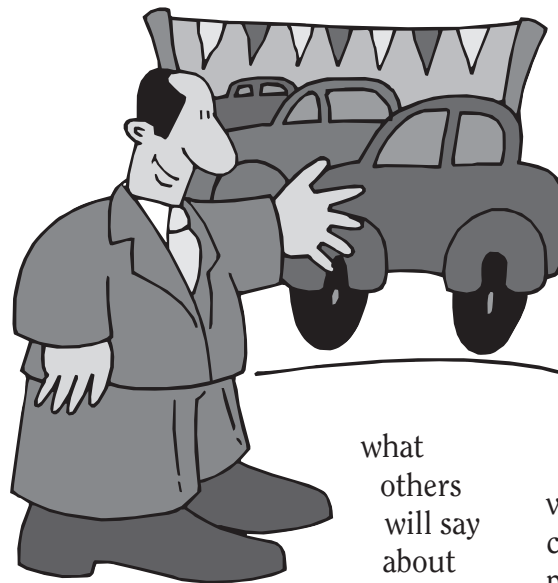
Personal Visitation Prevents Alienation

It would be easy for me to say, "I think I'll let someone else do this," or "I don't feel led," or "This must not be the will of God for me." But if I take this approach, I'll unfortunately become what so many other pastors are: pencil-sharpening, paper-pushing administrators who are so alienated from the people that they really think they are ministering by sitting in an office, living in the suburbs, and writing books on evangelism.

That's why everyone on staff should visit. We all must visit. We all must run the risks. We should do it because everything rises and falls on leadership. I cannot expect anyone in this ministry to do anything that I'm not willing to do myself. Once we allow ourselves to become alienated from the people we minister to, we lose our effectiveness. It's easy to teach and preach visitation and soul-winning from the pulpit; it's another thing entirely to be out there leading the way.

Personal Visitation Prepares Personalities

I want to watch kids in our Sidewalk Sunday School grow up and start their own personal visitation programs. I want them to know the value of visitation, to not be afraid to go out. I want them to be unconcerned about



what others will say about them.

As a result of visiting, many of these kids will eventually go into full-time ministry. You see, their personalities were prepared for the gentle tugging of the Holy Spirit by being out on the field

on a regular basis, learning to give back what someone had given them.

Personal Visitation Promotes Productivity

We constantly hear leaders loathe laziness on the part of church members. Yet those same leaders fail to see that personal visitation produces productivity. I have heard it said many times: "If you brag on Cadillacs, you will get Cadillacs. If you brag on good Sunday School teachers, you will get good Sunday School teachers. If you brag on good soul-winners and a good visitation program, that is what you will get."

Do not delegate personal visitation to a committee. A committee is "the unfit, appointed by the unwilling, to do the unnecessary." Rather, take a couple of people who have visitation and soul-winning burning in their bones, give them some direction, and turn them loose to visit weekly. Then talk about their productivity in the bulletin

and from the platform. Brag on them. There is no telling what may happen to your church.

For five years I worked for Tommy Barnett, pastor of Phoenix First Assembly of God, who was then in Davenport, Iowa. Tommy, who is, in my opinion, the greatest soul-winner and motivator in this generation, said something that has stuck with me through the years: "Your week revolves around your soul-winning and visitation time; your soul-winning and visitation time does not revolve around your week."

I've built on that. The secret is to set a specific time each week to go out and visit, whether you're visiting your Sunday School class, youth group, bus route or part of the adult congregation. Set that time aside

to build relationships with the people, and don't let anything squeeze the time out. It just boils down to discipline and priority. Make sure not only that your folks will be in services or classes the coming weekend, but that their needs are being met. Be prepared to win them to the Lord in their own homes.

Personal Visitation Projects an Image

Every ministry today projects a certain image in its community. The question is, "What kind?"

Everyone in our city should know who we are. So how does everyone know about us? Simple. In my church we have projected an image of being out on the street every week on every block throughout our neighbor-

hoods. On any given day you can see our workers, Sunday School fliers in hand, going door-to-door, standing in front of elementary schools and on street corners, hanging out at parks and playgrounds, visiting with the kids on our roll sheets. Our personal visitation program has to become almost an institution in the city in which we work. We want to project an image of caring and doing.

As these young kids grow up and advance through Sunday School into the preteen and teen departments, then into the adult areas, my prayer and goal is that they will see the vision that helped win them to the Lord and the burden that keeps us motivated. Seeing and being around love in action perpetuates that fire in others.

Questions for Further Study—

1. In what ways does personal visitation prevent alienation?

2. In what ways does personal visitation promote productivity?