

OVERCOMING OBSTACLES TO MEMBER VISITATION
IN THE 21ST CENTURY

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ABSTRACT

“The home-going pastor makes a church-going people.” This advice has been given to pastors for more than 150 years, but is it true, relevant, or even practical for a 21st century pastor to conduct regular personal visits with his members in their homes, or anywhere else for that matter? This paper seeks to answer the question, “How can a pastor overcome obstacles to pastoral visitation in the 21st century?” After studying the biblical basis for pastoral visitation, I researched obstacles to member visitation by interviewing more than 20 pastors and by polling 88 pastors and 473 lay members using two online *SurveyMonkey* surveys. I also consulted recent articles and books to learn about cultural and sociological obstacles to in-home visitation. I collected data from the online surveys to challenge the perceived obstacles to visitation and to compile current ideas and strategies for overcoming obstacles. Finally, I organized and reported on the congregational and pastoral benefits to regular member visitation. This thesis concludes that pastoral visitation is still beneficial, viable, and advisable in the 21st century. Some perceived obstacles are actually stereotypes that can be turned into opportunities, and the true obstacles to visitation can be overcome with prioritization and planning.

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Literature Review

To research for this thesis, I started by reading pastoral theology books from different time periods to see what each had to say about pastoral visitation. Even the older books expected that there would be obstacles to member visitation. Each generation commented about how in-home visitation was harder than the previous generation, although the reasons varied. One very helpful book was *Pastoral Theology* by C.F.W Walther, written in 1871. Walther quoted a number of Lutheran pastoral theology books, written in the 1700s, which showed me that visitation has been a common practice for Lutherans for a long time. I also really appreciated *The Shepherd under Christ* because it helped me get started on the biblical basis for pastoral visitation. One of the first books I read was Bradford Lyle's *Building Relationships Through Pastoral Visitation* which was published in 1984. I was surprised to see that many of the same obstacles to 21st century pastoral visitation were also mentioned 30 years ago. I enjoyed Lyle because the book was entirely devoted to visitation and it gave some practical ideas. Unfortunately, he didn't say much about actually sharing God's word during visits.

A 2006 article in the *American Sociological Review* called "Social Isolation in America"¹ was also helpful for learning about recent social changes and their potential impact on pastoral visitation. However, I did not want to focus too much on general sociological issues in America. I wanted to be very current and very specific. I wanted to see how our own WELS congregation members felt about pastoral visitation and entertaining in the homes. To accomplish this, I started by interviewing over 20 pastors. My interview questions can be found in Appendix III. Then I created a survey using *SurveyMonkey* which I shared through Facebook starting on October 31, 2015. I also asked friends and classmates to share the survey on their Facebook pages. The survey continued to be shared, and both WELS and non-WELS lay members filled it out. In less than a week, over 450 people from throughout the country of a variety of ages had filled out the survey. People seemed to be interested in this topic. The results of this survey can be found in Appendix I. I also created a pastor survey which I shared through Facebook starting on October 31, 2015 which 88 pastors completed. In one day, on November 3rd, 2015, 50 pastors filled it out! This survey can also be found at the end of the paper in Appendix II. I gave the

¹ McPherson, Miller, Lynn Smith-Lovin, and Matthew E. Brashears. 2006. "Social Isolation in America: Changes in Core Discussion Networks over Two Decades". *American Sociological Review* 71 (3). [American Sociological Association, Sage Publications, Inc.]: 353–75. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30038995>.

members and the pastors opportunities to comment after each question, and the bulk of my research for this paper comes from the results of the surveys and that comments that were given in the surveys. It was a great blessing for me to have such current research from WELS pastors and members on the topic of visitation.

Introduction

When I was a kid, I used to go on visits to the nursing home with my dad, who is a pastor. We also regularly spent time in the homes of members of the church in Hoskins, NE. Even as a boy, member visitation was something that I was familiar with. I remember first formally learning about pastoral visitation during my second year of seminary in Pastoral Theology class. Professor John Schuetze referenced the book his father co-wrote, *The Shepherd under Christ*, and he recited the old adage, “A home-going pastor makes a church-going people.”² We then spent the rest of the class period discussing if that was still true in the 21st century. Could a pastor still regularly visit the members of his congregation in their homes as easily as he could when *The Shepherd under Christ* was published in 1974? How could a 21st century WELS pastor live out the spirit of the “home-going pastor” in a society where people are not as willing to open up their homes?

I have always been interested in the subject of personal one-on-one visitation. Since I was young, I have loved talking with people and learning about them. I have also spent 4 years working as a Job Developer at Goodwill Industries where a large component of my job was getting to know people with disabilities by spending one on one time with them at home and in the community. I would take what I learned about them, their interests, and their abilities and find good employment matches in the Milwaukee area. I also had opportunities during my vicar year in Thornton, CO to set up and conduct pastoral visits with members in their homes. I really enjoyed the personal visitation, and I think it helped me grow a lot over the course of vicar year. I needed to learn more.

To explore the topic of pastoral visitation in the 21st century, I wanted to see if member visitation practices had changed from the days when people were quoting, “The home-going pastor made for a church-going people.” I asked a number of questions. Have obstacles to

² Armin W Schuetze and Irwin J Habeck, *The Shepherd Under Christ* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1989) 142.

member visitation changed so much that in-home, non-crisis, personal visitation is no longer viable? What are the benefits of member visitation? Are there good strategies for conducting and setting up these visits? I thought that the best way to learn more about the most up-to-date practices in WELS was to interview and poll WELS lay members and WELS pastors. Between the interviews and surveys I got information from over 100 WELS pastors and about 480 lay members (almost 400 of whom were WELS). I also consulted historical and current articles and books discussing strategies and practices for pastoral care to learn more about visitation. Finally, I researched sociological trends to learn more about if our culture was becoming more private, isolated, and less-willing to have pastors conduct in-home personal visitation.

The visitation that I am talking about in this paper is a personal visit between pastor and member or a family of members. The visit is longer than small talk after church on a Sunday morning and will usually take place in a different location, the most common being in the member's home, in a church office, or at a community location like a coffee shop. The pastor seeks to get to know the member better and strengthen their personal relationship so that he could personally serve them in their particular needs. This visit is social, but it is also pastoral. A pastor will not avoid talking about spiritual things; in fact for the visit to be "pastoral," the pastor will share some kind of encouragement from God's Word during the visit. He may also share information about the direction of the church, ask for input, listen to concerns, and offer counsel. If the member needs to open up about things that are concerning them, that could also happen during a personal visit, but this pastoral visitation that I am writing about is not specifically a counseling session. I am also not specifically talking about evangelism visits or visits to the straying. A personal visit can have many different purposes, but in general I am talking about a non-crisis relationship building visit.

I will start by sharing a biblical basis for personal pastoral visitation, looking at the example of Jesus and the early church, and considering the biblical role of a pastor. Then I will share what pastors said were the biggest obstacles to member visitation in the 21st century. After identifying the obstacles, I will challenge some of them to show that they might be more stereotypes or excuses than true obstacles. However, recognizing that some challenges to regular pastoral visitation are very real, I will share current visitation strategies that WELS pastors are using today. Finally, I will also share some of the many awesome blessings and benefits that pastors and congregation members have experienced as a result of pastor visitation. The survey

questions, results, and graphs of the results for my pastor and member surveys can also be found in the three appendices to this paper. I pray that after reading this paper you will join me and consider making regular pastoral visitation a priority in your ministry.

Biblical Basis for Pastoral Visitation

What is a pastor?

The title “pastor” actually comes from the Greek word *ποιμήν* which means “shepherd.” In the list of ministry offices from Ephesians 4:11-12, congregational leaders are called shepherds. “It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors (*ποιμένας*) and teachers, to prepare God’s people for works of service.” The pastor’s task is to care for the congregation (Acts 20:28), to seek the lost (Matthew 18:12-14), to combat heresy (Acts 20:29), and to be an example for the flock (1 Peter 5:3).³ One of the aspects of the work of a pastor is to care for God’s flock which is entrusted to him. Professors Schuetze and Habeck write in *The Shepherd under Christ* that the very title of “pastor” implies that he “has the responsibility to minister not only to the congregation as such, but also to each individual member of his flock in particular.”⁴ In this section, we will consider how the Triune God visits his people, how Jesus visited people during his ministry, how the disciples in the early church practiced personal visitation, and how God’s word also calls pastors today to be shepherds who know their people personally.

The Triune God visits his people

God the Father has a history of coming to people and visiting them. God doesn’t wait for us to come to him. Consider the first 3 chapters of Genesis. God knows that it is not good for man to be alone, so he comes to Adam and has him name all the animals. When Adam realizes that there is not a helper suitable for him, God satisfies his need by giving him the perfect companion, and he brings her to Adam. God visits Adam personally with his blessings. When his creation later falls into sin and disobeys his commands, God walks through the Garden of Eden and personally calls out to Adam and Eve.⁵ He visits them in judgment and calls them to repentance. In his home visit, God shows them their sin, but he also visits them to show his

³ Kittel, G., Bromiley, G. W., & Friedrich, G. (Eds.). (1964–). *Theological dictionary of the New Testament* (electronic ed., Vol. 6, pp. 497–498). Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.

⁴ Armin W Schuetze and Irwin J Habeck, *The Shepherd Under Christ*, 139.

⁵ Bradford Lyle, *Building Relationships Through Pastoral Visitation* (King of Prussia, PA: Judson Press, 1984).

surprising grace. In Genesis 3:15, God shares with them the gospel promise that he will send a Savior to deliver them from their sin. God the Father comes to his people to show them his mercy and love.

God the Holy Spirit comes to us to connect us to the love of the Father. “He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit (Titus 3:5).” He visits us to give us faith through the gospel in word and sacrament. Paul writes, “From infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus (2 Timothy 3:15).” The Holy Spirit also visits his people to strengthen their faith through the gospel. In Acts 2, the Holy Spirit made a powerful home visit to the early Christian church. “When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting... All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:1-4).” After preaching to the crowd that day on Pentecost, Peter promised the forgiveness of sins in connection with the work of the Holy Spirit through the word of God. “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38).” In Acts 10:44-48, the Holy Spirit made a home visit to the household of Cornelius after Peter spoke the message of the gospel to the people there. “While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message (Acts 10:44).”

The Son of God visits his people too. The one who was present and active from eternity and at creation came in time to rescue his people who had all fallen away. “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us (John 1:14).” We celebrate Christmas because Jesus came to visit us. He became part of our lives and become one of us. When the time was just right, he came to buy us back from sin and death. “When the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law (Galatians 4:4,5).”

Jesus practiced personal visitation

Much of Jesus ministry was performed out in public as he preached in the temple courts, on boats from the Sea of Galilee, and on hillsides before large crowds. But his ministry was also very intimate and personal. He didn't have people sign up or apply to be his disciples, but instead, he found them. He visited people at work and in the community and individually called them to follow him. Take the calling of Matthew for example. “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 (Matthew 9:9).” After calling Matthew, Jesus also made a home evangelism visit to his new disciple to meet his friends and co-workers. “While Jesus was having dinner at Matthew’s house, many tax collectors and “sinners” came and ate with him and his disciples (Matthew 9:10).” Jesus attended this dinner party at Matthew’s house to strengthen his disciple and especially to reach out to the tax collectors and “sinners” with his message of the forgiveness of sins. Jesus invited himself for a similar home visit to the house of Zacchaeus the tax collector. “Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today (Luke 19:5).” Jesus reached out to visit people with the gospel because he came to seek and to save the lost (Luke 19:10).

Jesus also visited people personally to share comfort and bring healing. After a day of teaching, Jesus showed personal care for the mother of Simon Peter in her home. “Jesus left the synagogue and went to the home of Simon. Now Simon’s mother-in-law was suffering from a high fever, and they asked Jesus to help her. So he bent over her and rebuked the fever, and it left her. She got up at once and began to wait on them (Luke 4:38,39).” Jesus agreed to go to the home of Jairus to heal his sick daughter, but he was delayed, and she died while he was still on the way. Jesus still went to the home. He took the dead child by the hand, and raised her to life (Luke 8:40-46). One personal visit that has always given me comfort is the visit Jesus made when his friend Lazarus died (John 11). Jesus came to the home of Mary and Martha, and he wept with them. He listened to them and empathized with them. Jesus also comforted them with the truth of the resurrection of the dead. “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die (John 11:25,26).” Finally, Jesus also visited Lazarus and spoke words of power that reached beyond the grave, “Lazarus, come out!” Jesus showed his friends, whom he loved and knew personally, that he was the true God who had power over the grave.

Jesus also used home visits to continue teaching his disciples. On another occasion Jesus was at the home of Mary and Martha, and Mary sat at Jesus’ feet, listening to what he had to say. Martha was worried about making sure that the house was clean and the food was prepared, but Jesus said that the only thing that was important was listening to the word of God. ““Martha, Martha,” the Lord answered, “You are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her (Luke 10:41,42).”” Another time Jesus was in a house teaching people from Galilee, Judea, and

Jerusalem when a paralyzed man was lowered from a roof before him. Jesus used the opportunity to share the comfort of forgiveness for his soul and to give healing for his body (Luke 5:17-26). While he was teaching his disciples in a house in Capernaum, Jesus used a child in the household to teach his disciples about humility (Mark 9:33-37).

In John 10, Jesus calls himself the Good Shepherd. He knows his sheep individually, by name. Jesus' sheep also know his voice, and they listen to him and follow him. The Good Shepherd protects and cares for his sheep so much that he lays down his life for the sheep. Jesus is the greatest shepherd, and in his grace he has chosen to make us his under-shepherds who get strength from him and imitate him.

The apostles practiced personal visitation

When Jesus first sent out the 12 disciples, he told them to go out from village to village preaching the gospel. They were to go out and stay in people's homes in the different cities they were preaching in. Jesus said, "Whatever house you enter, stay there until you leave that town (Luke 9:4)." The disciples practiced house to house personal ministry as they shared the gospel with people. The early church leaders also practiced home visitation as the fledgling church grew. Acts 5:42 says that, "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." From house to house the disciples were personally sharing the gospel that creates and strengthens faith! This was also Paul's practice that he shared with the elders in Ephesus in Acts 20:20, "You know that I have not hesitated to preach anything that would be helpful to you but have taught you publicly and from house to house." Paul strengthened the community of believers by preaching to large groups of people and by teaching smaller groups of people in homes. Paul believed in the old adage, "A house going pastor makes for a church going people."⁶

The apostles were not just preachers who gathered the group of believers together on Sunday mornings, taught them, and then sent them on their way. Paul reminds the congregation in Thessalonians 2:8, "Because we loved you so much, we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well." The apostles shared their lives with the people. What does that mean? The pastors knew their members personally. He not only preached to them, but he worked alongside them. He lived among them. He suffered with them and

⁶ James P. Tiefel, "Small Group Bible Study and Adult Education in the WELS," April 14, 1994, <http://www.wlssays.net/bitstream/handle/123456789/1634/TiefelSmall.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>.

experienced the joy of the gospel with them. It is evident from the personal greetings at the end of Paul's epistles that Paul knew his congregation members individually and he cared about them deeply. Paul also knew that he would personally benefit by getting to know the other Christians that he was ministering to. In Romans 1:11,12, he writes to a church that he had not yet visited personally, "I long to see you so that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to make you strong—that is, that you and I may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith." Paul plans to share some spiritual blessing with the Romans, and he is confident that they will also be a blessing and an encouragement to him.

Pastors are called to shepherd their people

When Paul was encouraging the Ephesian elders in Acts 20, he urged them to be shepherds over the members of the Christian church there. Paul said that church leaders have a responsibility to teach their people correct doctrine and protect them from false teachers:

Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds (ποιμαίνειν) of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood. I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock...So be on your guard! Remember that for three years I never stopped warning each of you night and day with tears (Acts 20:28–31).

Peter also encourages elders to shepherd the flock that is under their care.

Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away (1 Peter 5:2-4).

Peter says that a pastor serves as an overseer of the flock and as an example to the flock. One way that a pastor might "shepherd" his people is by visiting them and by following the example of the Good Shepherd. "The point might be made that even as Jesus, the Good Shepherd, showed such caring ministry to individuals and was ready to go to them, so pastors as under-shepherds, are to be the ones who follow His example in their care for souls."⁷ The pastor, the under-shepherd, also has the opportunity to help his congregation become familiar with the voice of the

⁷ Phillip Zarling, "The Mechanics of Member Visitation," accessed September 15, 2015, WLS Essay File, 2.

Good Shepherd. The pastor will do this through preaching and teaching in the church building, but he will also seek to become familiar with his congregation, the sheep of God's flock.

A visiting pastor can follow the example of Jesus when he was in the home of Matthew as he visits all kinds of people. Pastors will try to connect with members as well as their friends and unchurched family members. Pastors today can follow in the footsteps of the Great Physician, bringing the healing of Jesus to the homes of people who need comfort. In a personal visit a pastor can weep with his people who mourn and share with them the promise of eternal life. He can also laugh and be a friend to people, just as Jesus is a friend to us. A pastor can also share the priorities of Jesus as he teaches his people in a home-visit. I found out that people today are still a lot like Martha in Luke 10. They are worried about making sure their house is clean and prepared when a pastor is visiting. Pastors today can do their best to take the pressure off, set them at ease, and continue to point them to the one thing that it needed. A pastor will have an opportunity to help his people focus on God's word during a pastoral visit and will be able to share the truths of that word to his members individually. He can teach them how the Bible has the answers for all of life's most important questions. By practicing personal visitation, pastors will also follow the example of Paul and share not only the gospel of God, but their lives as well. Both the pastor and the member will be encouraged!

However, the argument might be made that we do not live in the time of Jesus and the apostles anymore. Church is not usually held in people's homes like it was in the time of Acts. Our society in 21st century America is much different than the society of Paul, who went out proclaiming Christ "house to house." I would argue that the main premise has not changed. A pastor is still called to personally minister to his people and his flock. Often this can still include pastoral visitation. Might that visitation look different today than it did in the time of Jesus and the apostles? Yes, it probably will look different, but pastors today can still join in the exciting work of personally visiting with and sharing God's word with Christians in their 21st century context. This paper will offer strategies that pastors are using today, and it will show the beautiful benefits of personal visitation with members.

History of Member Visitation

"A home-going pastor makes a church-going people." Until I started researching for this paper, I was under the impression that that phrase originated in the WELS. I naively thought that

Professors Schuetze and Habeck had coined it themselves. But then I went back and reread *The Shepherd under Christ*, and I saw that they were calling it an “old adage” back in 1974. The phrase did not originate in the WELS. As I continued to research, I found out that the “home-going pastor” adage is at least 150 years old, and it has been used in America and overseas. In a London publication from 1884, the author used the phrase, “a home-going parson makes a church going people,” and described it then as “the old saying.”⁸ Pastoral visitation is an old concept. We have seen how God has been visiting his people since the beginning of time and how Jesus and the apostles visited people to encourage them and to share God’s word with them. Pastoral ministry has always been personal ministry where pastors strive to know their people individually to share the gospel with them.

As the gospel came to America, pastors needed to visit people in their homes. During his *Lutheranism in America* class and in personal conversation, Professor John Brenner argued that on the frontier, starting a church was not as simple as raising up a building and opening the doors. As people started new lives in America, they often left religion behind. Parents were busy with the day to day work of supporting a family in a new land, and they didn’t always do a good job of teaching the Christian faith to their children. After a couple generations without solid biblical teaching, many on the frontiers of America had become Christian in name only, if that. A frontier pastor was a true evangelist who needed to meet people in their homes and share the gospel with them.⁹

Brooks Holifield writes in *A History of the Christian Clergy in America* that in the 1720s, the main means of pastoral care was still a visit to the home. He gives the example of Pastor Ebenezer Parkman, who made as many as 6 visits a day and in some cases of sickness, he remained at the house overnight. At that time, purposes for visitation included inquiring about the state of the soul and offering lessons in piety. Some pastors also took notes on the spiritual condition of their members. Confessional Lutheran pastors desired to personally share the comfort of the gospel. Holifield writes that Lutheran pastor Heinrich Muhlenberg (1711-1787) visited members so that they could speak one on one in confidence about matters in which they desired counsel and comfort. Another purpose for visitation was relationship building. “Some visits remained at the level of casual conversation. One minister argued in 1772 that visits

⁸ Charles Bullock, *Home Words for Heart and Hearth* (London: “Home Words” Publishing Office, 1884) 131.

⁹ John Brenner, In-person conversation, February 10, 2016.

should help people overcome their fear of the clergy and learn to converse freely with them. But the overriding purpose was spiritual inquiry and guidance.”¹⁰

I also read an 1875 report from the annual meeting of the members of the Church of England, showing that pastors 100 years later also found pastoral visitation important. Pastors in the meeting described their strategies for visitation. One pastor said that he would look over the church record book and make note of people’s birthdays and anniversaries before visiting them in the home. He would also make a point of talking to the children and wishing them a happy birthday if it was near that date. Another pastor advocated walking a lot and meeting people anywhere he could. “I often think what a blessed thing it was that our Lord went about on foot teaching and healing the people! I think we should follow our people everywhere, even to the alehouse! Let us also follow then to the plough, and talk with agricultural labourers as they are ploughing, and try to get them to church.”¹¹ One pastor in the report referred to the adage, “a house-going parson makes a church going people,” but he warned that a pastor does little good by perpetually worrying people into coming to church. The ultimate goal of visitation for him was not to get people to come to church but to encourage personal devotion and to represent himself as a loving shepherd who cares about the flock personally.¹²

The idea that there are obstacles to pastoral visitation is not a new phenomenon. In a 1910 article from the *New York Observer*, a pastor was already saying, “It is rather going out of fashion in these days for ministers to make pastoral calls. I found in my early days in New York that a home-going pastor makes a church-going people.”¹³ This pastor spent hours each day climbing stairs and visiting in apartment houses and tenement houses. He says that he made as many as one hundred and twenty-five calls in a week, sometimes 25 in an afternoon. Reflecting back he said, “I can’t do as much of this as I once did, but I try to see each family once a year and to make calls on all who are ill. I believe the man who will do this today will not preach to empty pews; at least, not so many empty pews.”¹⁴ Another pastor reflected on his ministry in the 1940s in his autobiography. A feature of his ministry was calling, as in those days ministers were supposed to spend afternoons calling. In the 40s, he tried to visit the men of the

¹⁰ Holifield, E. Brooks. *God’s Ambassadors: A History of the Christian Clergy in America*. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2007, 90.

¹¹ Church Congress, *Annual Report. 1861-70, 72-1925, 30, 35, 38* (London: William Wells Gardner, 1875) 572.

¹² *Ibid.* 575.

¹³ “Nearly Forty Years in Harness. Dr. MacArthur in Reminiscent Mood.,” *New-York Observer*, April 21, 1910, <https://books.google.com>.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

congregation at work and their wives and children at home because he didn't want to neglect anyone. He reflected that in 1999, this pastoral function of visitation seemed to have dropped out over the years because of the complexities and busyness of life.¹⁵

What about pastoral visitation in the WELS or in Confessional Lutheranism? Has there been an expectation that our pastors should be “home-going pastors”? In C.F.W. Walther's *Pastoral Theology*, which he completed writing in 1871, Walther says, “If the new preacher has entered his office, then it is his duty to use the first weeks or months, in part, to visit all families and individuals who belong to his parish, in order to get to know them personally.”¹⁶ Walther goes on to quote C.T. Seidel's *Pastoraltheologie*, which was published in 1749 and is the earliest German work that used the term “pastoral theology.”¹⁷ Seidel had written, “In the days following the inaugural sermon, it is the duty of the teacher to get to know his congregation... He should visit each house in order.”¹⁸ Later in the book, Walther also quotes Lutheran professor Salomon Deyling's work *Institutiones Prudentiae Pastoralis* which he wrote in 1739. “So the Apostle Paul did not omit to teach each one... individually, from house to house, as well as publically... So every minister of the church is obligated to undertake the same home visitation and private teaching.”¹⁹

The book that replaced Walther's *Pastoral Theology* in the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod was *Pastoral Theology* by John H. Fritz, written in 1932. Wisconsin Synod seminarians had been studying pastoral theology using Professor John Schaller's *Pastorale Praxis*, which was published in German in 1913 (and has not been translated into English). When Fritz's *Pastoral Theology* was published, WELS seminarians also began using it for their classes since it was written in English.²⁰ Fritz also expects that Lutheran pastors will be visiting pastors. He concedes that pastors will be busy with many responsibilities, but they should still take time to visit all the homes in their parish. He writes, “Fortunately most congregations and parishes are not so large that a pastor is prevented from visiting regularly and frequently (once or twice a year) the homes of his members.”²¹ In *The Shepherd under Christ*, a WELS pastor is encouraged

¹⁵ Goslin, Thomas S., and Carnegie S. Callian. *Out to Pastor: The Autobiography of Thomas S. Goslin II*. Pasadena: Hope Publishing House, 1999, 79.

¹⁶ C.F.W. Walther, *Pastoral Theology*, trans. John M. Drickamer (New Haven, MO: Lutheran News, Inc., 1995) 55.

¹⁷ Roger Hurding, *Five Pathways to Wholeness* (SPCK, 2013).

¹⁸ C.F.W. Walther, *Pastoral Theology* 55.

¹⁹ Ibid 196.

²⁰ Armin W Schuetze and Irwin J Habeck, *The Shepherd Under Christ*, ix.

²¹ John H.C. Fritz D.D., *Pastoral Theology* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1932) 184.

to “visit his members systematically and regularly in order to learn to know them better and to gain their confidence.”²² Professors Schuetze and Habeck, writing in the 70s, note that making in-home visits might not be as easy as it was in previous generations, but they still encourage pastors to visit their members. They write that visiting each family once a year might be considered the ideal, but the size of the congregation will also have to be taken into account.²³

Pastors at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary are still encouraged to meet regularly with the members of their congregation and build personal relationships, but most professors admit that it is not as easy to meet with people as it once was. One of President Wendland’s final encouragements for seniors who are about to enter the ministry is an encouragement that was also passed down from previous presidents of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary. The encouragement included, among other things, getting to know your congregation personally. President Wendland admitted that it might not be easy to meet individually with everyone, there will be obstacles, but it is well worth the effort to build relationships with the people you shepherd.²⁴

So what does pastoral visitation look like out in the field today? Has pastoral visitation dropped out of favor over the years? Are pastors or congregation members less willing to meet for personal visits? Pastor Phil Sievert, in Thornton, CO, said in a phone interview that in his ministry he that has seen a shift in member visitation. He noticed that people are more open to meeting at church or in a coffee shop than in the home.²⁵ Pastor Joel Spaude in Fort Collins, CO said that he has noticed that WELS pastors still seem to conduct every member visits when they first arrive at a congregation, but that few continue to do regular every member visitation after that first round of visits.²⁶ Is pastoral visitation on the decline? Has culture changed so much that in-home visitation no longer makes sense? We will consider the obstacles to regular member visitation in the next chapter.

Obstacles to Pastoral Visitation

So what are the obstacles to pastoral visitation in the 21st century? Have they changed from the obstacles of previous generations? To answer these questions I consulted older pastoral

²² Armin W Schuetze and Irwin J Habeck, *The Shepherd Under Christ*.141.

²³ Ibid. 142

²⁴ Paul Wendland, In-person interview, January 20, 2016.

²⁵ Phil Sievert, Phone Interview, October 16, 2015.

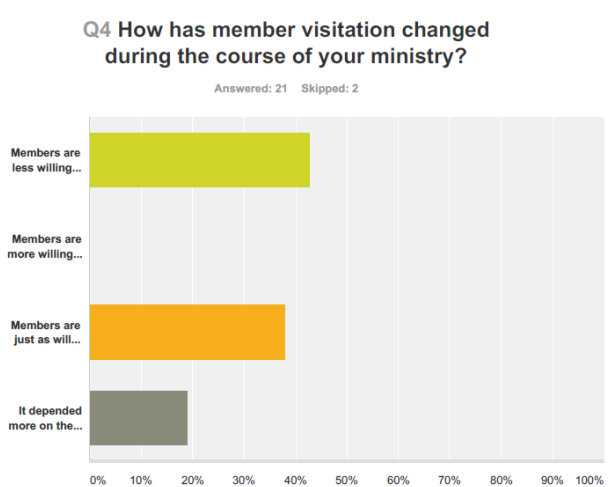
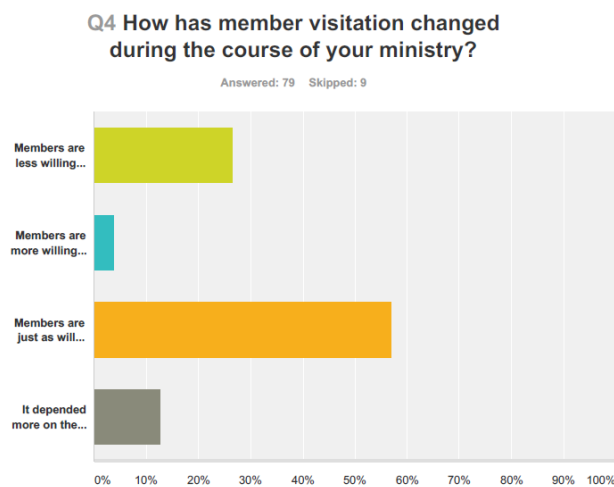
²⁶ Joel Spaude, Phone Interview, October 21, 2015.

theology manuals and more recent articles and blogs written by pastors. I also conducted phone or face-to-face interviews with over 20 pastors. My interview questions can be found in Appendix III. Finally, I also sent out a survey, which 88 WELS pastors completed. This survey and the responses are found in Appendix II. Two survey questions explored the obstacles to home visits from pastors. The first (question 4 on the survey) asked, “How has member visitation changed during the course of your ministry?” The following options were available for choices: “Members are less willing to meet for a home visit. Members are more willing to meet for a home visit. Members are just as willing to meet for a home visit today as they were at the beginning of my ministry. It depended more on the individual congregation’s location/culture than anything else.” I also gave pastors a chance to leave their comments.

The other survey question that explored obstacles to pastoral visitation was question 7: “Please describe the obstacles that you face as you do or consider doing member visitation. Check all that apply.” The following choices were available: “My schedule is already very busy. My members’ schedules are very busy. Members don’t like having their pastor in the home. People in general don’t like entertaining in their home.” They had the opportunity to leave comments as well. Included below are two views of the results for questions 4 and 7. The first set of graphs show the responses for all 88 pastors who took the survey, and the second set shows the responses of pastors who are age 41 and older, who I assumed would be able to give a more informed and experienced view of changes in receptiveness to home visitation and obstacles to home visitation.

Answers from all pastors

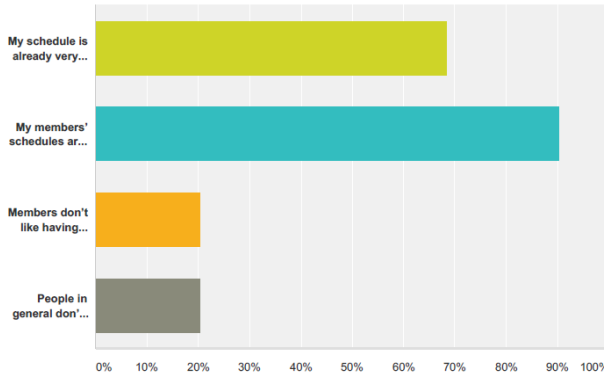
Answers from pastors age 41 and up



Answers from all pastors

Q7 Please describe the obstacles that you face as you do or consider doing member visitation. Check all that apply.

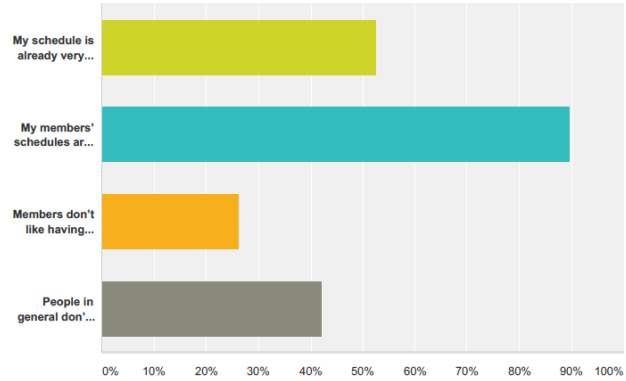
Answered: 73 Skipped: 15



Answers from pastors age 41 and up

Q7 Please describe the obstacles that you face as you do or consider doing member visitation. Check all that apply.

Answered: 19 Skipped: 4



After reviewing the comments left by pastors, the reoccurring themes concerning obstacles to home visitation could be divided into two main categories: Internal obstacles related more to the pastor, and external obstacles related to congregation members and society in general. I have organized this chapter according to these topics.

Internal Obstacles

Inexperienced

Conducting a visit in a member's home is a big deal. A pastor can't hide behind the pulpit and preach a sermon that he spent all week preparing, after which he says, "Amen," and there is no chance for feedback. In a home visit, a pastor has the opportunity to go onto another person's turf and learn about their real life and respond to their real questions. For many new pastors, and probably even some older ones, home visitation can be intimidating. The 1987 book *Ministerial Ethics and Etiquette* mentions many of the same obstacles that pastors still face nearly 30 years later. The author says that the tension of a visit can be wearing on the minister. There is an outpouring of nervous energy, and a studied effort to size up the situation in every home and treat it accordingly. Calling on people of diverse occupations, states of health, manners of life, and so on is a difficult task.²⁷ Pastors don't always begin their ministry with lots of experience scheduling and conducting home visits. One pastor said, "If I'm scheduling the

²⁷ Nolan Harmon, *Ministerial Ethics and Etiquette* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1987) 83.

visit, I feel uncomfortable inviting myself over to someone's home. I do try to make the most of each opportunity to visit members when they invite me over.” One newer pastor responded, “I'm not very good at making the visits more meaningful.” Another said, “Unfortunately I haven't developed a good strategy for visiting with people. It's more of a random/shotgun approach.”

Busy schedule of a pastor

In both large and small congregations, pastors who completed my survey said that their own schedule was an obstacle to pastoral visitation. 84% of pastors surveyed who served congregations of 200-1000 members said that their own schedule was a barrier to pastoral visitation. 54% of pastors of congregations of 200 members or less listed their schedule as “already very busy.” One pastor commented:

Busyness is a big obstacle - and excuse - for doing member visitation. I don't think that any of our members would be opposed to having pastoral visits in their homes. Many would probably enjoy it. In a church with 300+ family units, it is hard to make regular member visitation a priority. There is often very little time in the schedule for visiting, and that time is usually spent visiting prospects and/or inactive members. Regular members are those who get neglected.

Pastors have a lot of responsibilities in addition to preaching and pastoral work. Usually they have board meetings and Bible Information Classes in the evenings. They are preparing for Bible studies and catechism classes. They plan worship services and often are part of the church choir. Many pastors also already do other kinds of personal visitation including visiting home-bound members and making hospital visits, making regular evangelism visits, and conducting counseling sessions and pre-marriage classes. A pastor commented, “A great difficulty is simply the great number of needs there are among the members of a congregation. When there are hundreds of members, there are certainly hundreds of inactive members, hopefully dozens of prospects, couples getting married, funerals, hospitalizations, etc... It is simply impossible to give every member personal time, as good as that would be.”

Size of congregation

Many pastors wish that they could do more personal member visitation, but the task seems absolutely daunting when they look at the size of their church. Some pastors have attempted to complete every member visits in large congregations (the pastor I spoke to served more than 1000 members) and found it logistically impossible. They were never able to meet with more than 40% of the congregation, and they never saw a reason to attempt another every

member visit. One pastor wrote, “I visit hospitals weekly and make visits otherwise only if requested. I would love to visit more. Too many members (1,800) and not enough time. When I got to this congregation I planned on doing every member visits. I gave up after about a year. Simply too many people.” Some pastors felt like they had to put other ministry on hold for months. Others said they were seeing multiple families in an evening, and they didn’t feel like they got to know people very well anyway.

Technology replaces visitation

“But why do I need to go to a member’s home if phone and email accomplish the same thing in less time?” Many of the pastors that I heard from mentioned the time that personal face-to-face visitation requires as an obstacle to regularly visiting members. “A lot of what I could have accomplished with a visit gets accomplished through a phone call or email.” Some pastors also stated that members’ communication preferences were changing. A pastor wrote that members today “communicate (via text, Facebook message, e-mail, etc.) because that is how they communicate and they don't want anything more interpersonal than that... It's how they prefer to communicate.” Others wrote, “Communication with members in my church is much more digitally based these days. Texting has replaced phone calls and home visits.” “I make use of technology. I will call, text, email, or private message people. That seems to work really well.”

Difficulty of scheduling

Another major difficulty of conducting regular non-crisis member visits that pastors mentioned is that they take a lot of time and energy to get set up. Because setting up a visit includes matching the schedules of a busy pastor and busy church members, it can be a real challenge. One pastor said that, in his experience, it can sometimes take months to find a time that works for everyone to meet. He said this is even true with families who really want to have him over. Pastors felt like they were wasting time calling, emailing, and waiting to schedule and reschedule visits.

Family life of the pastor

Because most congregation members are more available in the evenings and on the weekends, visitation will necessarily happen during those time slots. One pastor mentioned to me that when he was a newly married new pastor, it was easy to see his members personally in

the evenings for every member visits, but now that his wife is working full time and he has young children, he has less free time than he did earlier in ministry. Some pastors also mentioned a need to carve out and guard time to be with their families. They mentioned that of course they are on call 100% of the time for emergencies, but they try to schedule evening time to spend with their families. A few other pastors commented that their availability for evening visitation has changed with the different stages of their lives. When their kids were small and went to bed earlier, it was easier to get out at night for visitation. Now that the kids are in high school there are school related activities at night which they attend when they can. After the kids are in college or out of the house, the evenings will free up more again.

Perceived External Obstacles

We have looked at internal obstacles to visitation that are directly related to the pastor, but in this next section, we will focus on external obstacles to visitation that are more related to the members' previous experience with pastoral visitation. We will also examine the perceived obstacles that are related to society and culture in general.

Members are unfamiliar with visitation

Many pastors mentioned in comments and interviews that personal, regular, in-home member visitation is no longer the common practice in our congregations that it used to be. Congregation members are not always used to a pastor wanting to meet with them outside of the Sunday service. Members might be anxious about a pastor coming to their home. Some members have only heard about the pastor making hospital visits or visiting after a crisis. "Those reared in the medieval Roman church would have understood this anxiety. 'What's the priest doing at my door? Do I have the plague? Is it time for last rites?' Those today unfamiliar with "house visitation" may offer a similar response."²⁸ Since regular member visitation is not perceived as normal in many congregations, maybe congregation members said that they did not expect the pastor try to visit them in their homes. Member visitation can become easy to avoid for a pastor when members are not asking for or expecting it anyway.

²⁸ Michael Horton, "Have You Ever Had a Pastoral Visit?," *White Horse Inn*, March 26, 2014, <https://www.whitehorseinn.org/blog/entry/friends/2014/03/26/have-you-ever-had-a-pastoral-visit>.

Negative history with pastors

Some members think that if a pastor wants to visit them, they must be in trouble. They have only heard about their pastor doing straying visits, so they must have done something wrong. Some members have said they were worried that the church was going to ask them for money or service. So pastors observed that members have been nervous about setting up personal visits with them. Pastors also commented that they perceive that some members just don't think they can relate to a pastor. A pastor commented, "There is perception I get that people don't know how to talk with me in a social/personal setting." Some people think that their pastor will judge them, and they don't know how to act around him.

Not a priority for the congregation

Not all congregations prioritize pastoral visitation. One pastor commented, "My congregation doesn't see non-crisis, non-shut-in, non-delinquent visitation as a priority. In fact, the leadership has a habit of scheduling (or trying to schedule) meetings on my visitations nights because they see them as free nights." Some see this lack of interest in visitation as a result of a congregational culture that is less open and welcoming. A young pastor commented:

I do believe that the congregation's culture is very important and influential. In my vicar congregation, there was a very open, welcoming culture. The pastor had very close relationships with just about everyone in the church. Visiting - especially prospects - was a huge part of our ministry. In my present, larger congregation, the church culture doesn't seem as warm or intimate. We pastors rarely visit members of the congregation, unless they are a shut-in or in the hospital. The average member never gets visited by their pastor. I don't think that's a good thing. Visiting members is not a big part of our ministry.

Members are worried about expectations

Pastors commented in the survey that many members were worried about having their pastor in their home because it wasn't as clean as they would like it to be. "I had one member family who just preferred meeting in my office because they were not 'good house cleaners.'"

Another pastor commented:

Some members feel intimidated to have the pastor in their house and that they have to have it pristine. In households with only one parent or both parents working, most people don't keep their houses immaculate during the week. That being said, I always prefer to meet in their house as it gives me a chance to enter their world. I'll always push for that, and only offer the office or an offsite location as an option if they make known they prefer not to meet at home.

Another pastor said that his members were sometimes more comfortable meeting at his office because they were ashamed of their neighborhood and their home, or they were worried about how the other people living in their home would act. Some members worry that there is an expectation to entertain the pastor. A pastor wrote, “I think sometimes there is also that expectation to entertain the pastor instead of just having a friendly conversation.”

Members have a busy schedule

90.4% of pastors surveyed agreed that a major obstacle to member visitation is that “my members’ schedules are very busy.” A pastor commented, “An even greater obstacle than my schedule are the schedules of my members. Everyone is so busy, even the retired members! Oftentimes, even when I do get something on the calendar, a member or I myself have to cancel and move it again. Prioritizing these visits is a challenge for everyone involved.” A number of pastors said that because of work schedules and the schedules of children, finding a time where families are willing and able to meet for a home visit is very difficult. They also mentioned that in many families, both parents work, and they are the drivers for all the activities that their children are involved in. Some parents deal with traffic that has them commuting from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. from Monday through Friday. When they are home as a family, they are eating supper, doing homework, or running to sports practices or other activities. A pastor wrote, “Unless members are retired, most of the visits would have to take place on the weeknights or weekends. Sometimes I find people like this time to themselves instead of having a pastor in their home.” A pastor respondent between the age of 60 and 70 commented that member visitation is more difficult for him than it was for his father, “Trying to schedule member visits is a work in frustration with a lack of cooperation by even active members. Hectic work schedules and nasty commutes in a large metro area make week-nights undesirable. Busy weekends remove the other choices.”

Members are less willing

Some pastors I spoke with believed that members today are not interested in pastoral visits in their homes. These pastors said the culture in the 21st century is more isolated and people are more private. People don’t invite each other over to their homes anymore. People in general would rather go out to eat than have people over. They would rather not have their pastor in their home either, and certainly not without a reason or an invitation. A pastor between the

ages of 40 and 50 responded to my survey, “There may have been a time when a visit in someone's home made them more comfortable. Today, this often makes them less comfortable, and many would rather meet at church.”

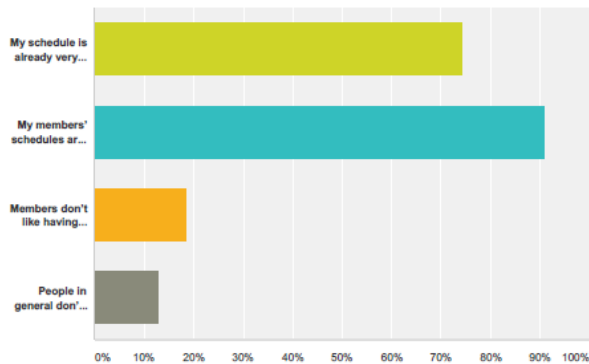
20% of pastors surveyed said that, regardless of scheduling obstacles, “Members don’t like having their pastor in the home,” and, “People in general don’t like entertaining in their home.” However, the percentage rose in pastors age 41 and older. 42% of them said that “People in general don’t like entertaining in their home.” So is it culturally true that people don’t want pastors in their homes? Should pastors avoid home visits in the 21st century? Has culture changed from being more open and accommodating to more private and guarded? Are people really cocooning and shutting themselves off from others, including their pastors? In the next chapter we will look at what members had to say about their impressions concerning member visitation.

Challenging the Obstacles to Visitation

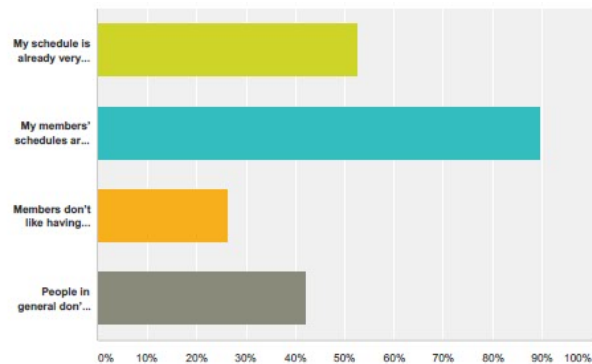
We have looked at some of the potential obstacles to member visitation, especially in-home visitation, but are all of these real “obstacles,” or is it possible they are just stereotypes that people believe are true? Are some perceived obstacles sometimes just used as excuses to avoid conducting home visits?

About 20% of pastors surveyed said that members didn’t want them or anyone else visiting their home. This view that people don’t want their pastor in their home has also come up in conversations that I have had with pastors. My research showed that this view that people are less willing to entertain in their homes than they used to be seems to be a more prominent belief among older pastors. Only about 13% of pastors surveyed who were age 40 and under said, “People in general don’t like entertaining in their homes.” But 41% of pastors age 41 and older reported, “People in general don’t like entertaining in their homes.” (Compare the lowest gray bars on the graphs below).

Pastors age 40 and under (below)



Pastors age 41 and older (below)



So, is the perception that people are cocooning and isolated actually true, or is this just a stereotype that many believe? If it is true that people are isolating themselves more and more and that they do not like to entertain in their homes, does it mean that pastors should avoid visiting their people in their homes? The other obstacle to pastoral visitation that I will focus on is the perception that members are too busy to meet outside of Sunday morning church. 90% of pastors surveyed reported that an obstacle they face when considering pastoral visitation is that, “My members’ schedules are too busy.” Is this a generational shift? Is it true that people are busier in the 21st century than they were in previous generations? If people are busy, does that mean that a pastor should not attempt to schedule personal visits with them? These are the questions and objections that will be addressed in this chapter. First, I will share sociological research on the topics of isolation, loneliness, and busyness in the 21st century. Then I will also compare that information with the results of my survey of 476 congregation members, 86% of whom are WELS, to share what members have to say about these perceived obstacles to pastoral visitation.

Are people more isolated?

Are Americans cocooning? “Cocooning is a term used in the United States to describe a retreat to the seclusion, safety, and comfort of home – the private sphere – away from the demands and risks of life outside in the public sphere or wider community.”²⁹ The term came into use with the publication of *The Popcorn Report* (1991), a book about market trends. The author, Faith Popcorn, called cocooning one of the key trends of the 90s and defined it as the

²⁹ David Levinson and Karen Christensen, *Encyclopedia of Community: From the Village to the Virtual World* (New York: SAGE Publications, 2003) 192-194.

need to protect oneself from the harsh unpredictable realities of the outside world. Popcorn said that this retreat can be brought about by a need for privacy and a desire to devote more time to family. It can also be instigated by fear of the outside world. Cocooning is closely associated with life in private, single-family homes.³⁰

In a 2013 article from *USA Today*, Mike Snider observed that the rise of technology also makes it easier for people to cocoon in their homes as they move from house to car to work and back to house again, all without having to engage with their neighbors or their communities if they don't want to. "Technology makes it possible for us to avoid leaving our homes ... With all the information and entertainment at arm's reach at home, why get out and meet up with a friend when you can chat on Facebook? Why go shopping for a book at Barnes & Noble when you can search through a virtually unlimited bookstore like Amazon and never leave your couch?"³¹ There is evidence that some people are cocooning and isolating themselves in their big houses with their technology.³² But does this mean that isolation is good for people?

Research says no. Isolation leads to loneliness, and research shows that both are on the rise. Johannah Cornblatt wrote in a 2009 *Newsweek* article that loneliness has been described as the negative emotional response people have when they notice a difference between the level of social interaction they would like to have and the contact that they actually receive. She reports, "Social-networking sites like Facebook... may provide people with a false sense of connection that ultimately increases loneliness in people who feel alone. These sites should serve as a supplement, but not replacement for, face-to-face interaction." She also reports that Michael J. Bugeja, a professor of communications at Iowa State University and author of *Interpersonal Divide: The Search for Community in a Technological Age*, says, "The human heart is suffering from lack of authentic interaction... Just being able to engage genuinely and politely with your neighbors is a better fix than Xanax could ever effect for mental stability."³³

Whether cocooning and isolation are the primary causes of loneliness or not, research shows that loneliness is increasing for people. Duke University researchers found that between 1985 and 2004, the number of people who said there was no one with whom they discussed

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Mike Snider, "Cocooning: It's Back and Thanks to Tech, It's Bigger," *USA TODAY*, February 18, 2013, <http://www.usatoday.com/story/tech/personal/2013/02/15/internet-tv-super-cocoons/1880473/>.

³² Faith Popcorn, *The Popcorn Report: Faith Popcorn on the Future of Your Company, Your World, Your Life* (New York: Harper Collins, 1992).

³³ Cornblatt, Johannah. 2009. "Lonely Planet: Isolation Increases In US." *Newsweek*. 8–20. <http://www.newsweek.com/lonely-planet-isolation-increases-us-78647>.

important matters tripled, to 25 percent.³⁴ Commenting on this same 2006 study on social isolation, a *Washington Post* article summarized the research saying, “Overall, the number of people Americans have in their closest circle of confidants has dropped from around three to about two.”³⁵

So why are we getting lonelier? Dr. Rebecca Harris, a Psychology lecturer at the University of Bolton in England, who is currently researching the effect loneliness can have on physical and mental health, points to changes in modern society as the cause. She says that people are moving farther away from their extended families and relying on social technology instead of face-to-face conversations in their relationships. She argues that when people rely on technology for maintaining relationships, those relationships feel more superficial and less rewarding. She also says that people who have been lonely for extended amounts of time will have even more trouble starting meaningful relationships because they will be anxious about making new friends, distrustful of others, and may feel inadequate about their own social skills.³⁶ Cornblatt echoes this thought, observing that America is becoming a more transient society. People are traveling farther from their families in search of better jobs, high-quality education, and nice weather. As they go, they will lose their local support network and have to establish a new one. This can lead to a prolonged sense of loneliness, especially in adults, who struggle to make new friendships quickly.³⁷

Do people enjoy entertaining in their homes?

Isolation and loneliness do appear to be on the rise in 21st century America. Even if people have isolated themselves and appear to be more private than they were 20 years ago, does that mean that they want to remain isolated and lonely? Can we infer that people in the 21st century do not even have the desire to entertain other people in their homes? According to my survey of almost 500 lay members, the answer is no. 85% of people marked 3 out of 5 or higher for how much they enjoy entertaining (see survey question 4 results below). People said that

³⁴ McPherson, Miller, Lynn Smith-Lovin, and Matthew E. Brashears. 2006. “Social Isolation in America: Changes in Core Discussion Networks over Two Decades”. *American Sociological Review* 71 (3). [American Sociological Association, Sage Publications, Inc.]: 353–75. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30038995>.

³⁵ Shankar Vedantam, “Social Isolation Growing in U.S., Study Says,” *The Washington Post*, June 23, 2006, sec. Nation, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/06/22/AR2006062201763.html>.

³⁶ Rebecca Harris, “Are We Lonelier than Ever?,” *The Independent*, March 30, 2015, <http://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/health-and-families/features/the-loneliness-epidemic-more-connected-than-ever-but-feeling-more-alone-10143206.html>.

³⁷ Cornblatt, “Lonely Planet.”

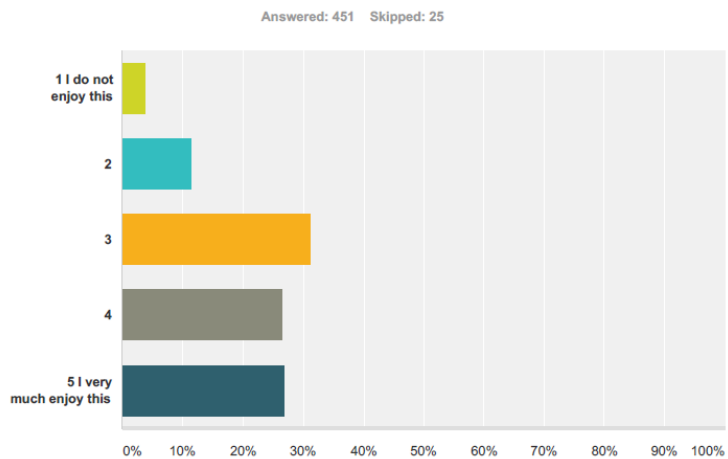
they want to be connected to others. They don't want to be lonely or isolated. One member wrote, "When we bought a house, we specifically looked for a house that had great spaces for entertaining guests." People still have the desire to have others over to their homes. This is even illustrated by turning on the television to HGTV for more than 15 minutes. It doesn't take long for someone to say, "We just need to tear out this wall so that I can have that open concept kitchen that we've always wanted. I want to be able to entertain!"

Some people commented on the member survey that they had introverted personalities and simply did not enjoy entertaining. Many others commented that they would love to entertain more in their homes, however, they didn't feel like their current residence was fit for entertaining. Nearly 27% of the respondents to the member survey

said, "I am not comfortable with the state or size of my home." Some of these people lived in tiny apartments, didn't feel their house was clean enough, or had pets and kids that they thought would be a distraction for entertaining. They had the desire to have people over to their home, but at the same time were uncomfortable opening their home to others.

It may seem like people are private and cocooning, but the majority of WELS members surveyed responded that they enjoy entertaining in their homes. The perceived privacy of society may not be a valid reason to write off member visitation. Loneliness and isolation seem to be trends in 21st century America, but are they really obstacles to visitation? Perhaps the church could turn this generalized loneliness into an opportunity instead of an obstacle! Personal visitation can be a positive step toward addressing the loneliness that so many in our culture face. Pastors and churches can reach out to hurting people with the message of the Savior who reaches out to them individually with forgiveness and concern. The church can also be an extended family for its members, especially those who struggle with isolation.

Q4 On a scale of 1 to 5, how much do you enjoy having people over to your home?



Are we busier than previous generations?

The other main obstacle that came up in both member and pastor surveys was the busyness of congregation members. 90% of pastors said that a main obstacle to visitation was that their members' schedules are very busy. However, I found it interesting that only 45% of lay members said that their busy schedule would lead them to decline a pastoral visit.

Are people really busier than they were in previous generations? In 1928, economist John Maynard Keynes composed a short essay titled "Economic Possibilities for Our Grandchildren," where he imagined what the world would look like in 100 years. "By 2028, he predicted, the "standard of life" in Europe and the United States would be so improved that no one would need to worry about making money. Our grandchildren, Keynes reckoned, would work about three hours a day, and even this reduced schedule would represent more labor than was actually necessary."³⁸ But these days never arrived. People today still feel busy and rushed. Where is the leisure time that Keynes predicted? Well, research shows that people in rich countries like the United States actually do have more leisure time than they used to. A 2014 article from *The Economist* reported that, "American men toil for pay nearly 12 hours less per week, on average, than they did 40 years ago"³⁹ In an article from *The Atlantic*, Derek Thompson points to research from Bridgid Schulte's book *Overwhelmed: Work, Love, and Play When No One Has the Time* and says, "Every advanced economy in the world is working considerably fewer hours on average than it used to... Between 1965 and 2011, time spent on housework and childcare for women declined by 35 percent (or 15 hours each week), thanks to dishwashers, TVs, and other appliances that assist the work of stay-at-home parents."⁴⁰

Americans commonly attribute the frantic pace that they feel in life to how much they work, but the evidence is more complicated. The Census Bureau's American Time Use Survey calculates the average workweek at 37.6 hours, which actually represents a decline since the

³⁸ Elizabeth Kolbert, "No Time," *The New Yorker*, May 26, 2014, <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2014/05/26/no-time>.

³⁹ "Why Is Everyone so Busy?," *The Economist*, December 20, 2014, <http://www.economist.com/news/christmas-specials/21636612-time-poverty-problem-partly-perception-and-partly-distribution-why>.

⁴⁰ Derek Thompson, "The Myth That Americans Are Busier Than Ever," *The Atlantic*, May 21, 2014, <http://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2014/05/the-myth-that-americans-are-busier-than-ever/371350/>.

1960s. Time spent on paid and un-paid work (like childcare and housework) has decreased, while leisure time has increased, yet Americans feel the opposite.⁴¹

Why do we feel so busy?

Americans do feel busy. Part of this busyness has to do with paid work. Americans are busy with work. Our annual hours have increased from 1,716 for the average workers in 1967 to 1,878 hours in the year 2000.⁴² But wait, didn't the previous section say that people were working less on average? Well, "Since 1950, young married women's work hours have tripled while married men's hours have declined, according to the *Philadelphia Fed*."⁴³ "The well-educated rich, married, working mother *is* overwhelmed."⁴⁴ Now more often both spouses work, and there are more single parent households. 40% of employed Americans work outside of the traditional 8 a.m. – 5 p.m., Monday – Friday schedule. Even if work hours are not increasing, their distribution has changed. Therefore, many people feel like time pressures have risen. The time children spend on school and studying has also increased 25% in the last 2 decades. Many children, and consequently, their families, maintain exhaustive schedules that include sports, lessons, and enrichment activities.⁴⁵

People also have so many more opportunities than they did in previous generations because of money and technology. Travel and entertainment are more available and affordable than ever before. It seems that people fill their time with more activities simply because there are more opportunities available. In the last 30 years, there has been an exponential expansion in the opportunities available for children, seniors, leisure, travel, education, at church, and in the community.⁴⁶ However, Elizabeth Kolbert observed in *The New Yorker*, "If we have become... as rich as Keynes imagined, this wealth has not translated into leisure. (When was the last time someone you know complained about having too little to do?)"⁴⁷

⁴¹ Kevin J. Vanhoozer, Charles A. Anderson, and Michael J. Sleasman, *Everyday Theology (Cultural Exegesis): How to Read Cultural Texts and Interpret Trends* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007) 156.

⁴² Kevin DeYoung, *Crazy Busy: A (mercifully) Short Book about a (really) Big Problem* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2013) 15.

⁴³ Aubhik Khan, "Why Are Married Women Working More? Some Macroeconomic Explanations," *PhiladelphiaFed*, Business Review, Q4 (2004), www.philadelphiafed.org.

⁴⁴ Thompson, "The Myth That Americans Are Busier Than Ever."

⁴⁵ Vanhoozer, Anderson, and Sleasman, *Everyday Theology (Cultural Exegesis)* 156.

⁴⁶ DeYoung, *Crazy Busy*, 22-26.

⁴⁷ Kolbert, "No Time."

One theory about the perception of busyness that I found really interesting is that people are actually keeping themselves very busy because it makes them feel more important. “One theory... is that busyness has acquired social status. The busier you are the more important you seem... Back in 1970, a Swedish economist named Staffan B. Linder argued that as people became wealthier they would inevitably feel more squeezed, because they would feel compelled to consume more and more goods per unit of free time.”⁴⁸ People in the US who are working the most are the highly educated and rich.⁴⁹ In the article from *The Economist*, “Why Is Everyone So Busy,” the observation is made that when people think about their time in terms of money, they get stingy with their time. “In an analysis of international time-stress data... (it was) found that complaints about insufficient time come disproportionately from well-off families. Even after holding constant the hours spent working at jobs or at home, those with bigger paychecks still felt more anxiety about their time.”⁵⁰ With more money people consume more stuff, including experiences for themselves and their children. “If leisureliness was once a badge of honour among the well-off of the 19th century, in the words of Thorsten Veblen, an American economist at the time, then busyness... has become that badge now. To be pressed for time has become a sign of prosperity, an indicator of social status, and one that most people are inclined to claim”⁵¹

Some see busyness as a virtue. Having a chance to relax with family or friends is laziness. We have to be getting things done and bettering ourselves! Some teachers give students lots of homework to prepare them for the busy world of adult life. When parents see busyness as a virtue, they push their kids hard in school and enroll them in all kinds of lessons and sports to prepare them for the demands of a hectic world.⁵² This could be the reason that some pastors don’t see personal relationship building visitation as an important part of their ministry. Perhaps they feel like there are more tangible things that they could be doing instead.

Are members too busy for a home visit?

There are many reasons that life can be busy including work, leisure, school, after-school activities, societal norms, and busyness as a badge of pride. But whatever the reasons are, the

⁴⁸Ibid.

⁴⁹ Thompson, “The Myth That Americans Are Busier Than Ever.”

⁵⁰ “Why Is Everyone so Busy?”

⁵¹ Ibid.

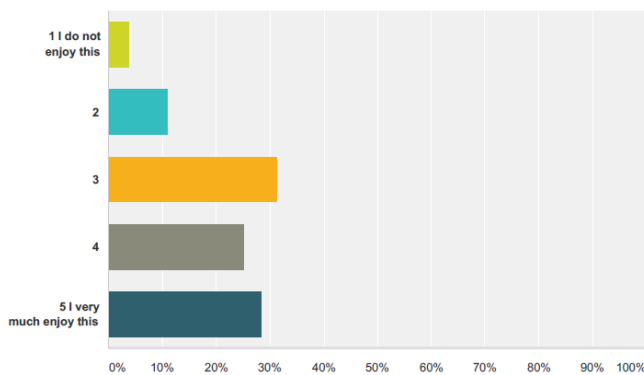
⁵² Vanhoozer, Anderson, and Sleasman, *Everyday Theology (Cultural Exegesis)* 160.

fact is, people in general do feel like they are busy. The members of WELS congregations feel busy. 45% of members said so in the survey. In the comments section, one person wrote, “Life is so busy. The house is sometimes not ready for company. Home seems like a "getaway" from all the busyness of the day.” In response to the question, “How much do you enjoy having people over to your home?” one member commented, “The difficulty always arises with meshing schedules. So many people work different shifts and weekends, it is difficult to get together.” Some people commented that their schedules are busy with after-school activities as well.

However, I found it surprising, that other than these comments above, very few people commented that their schedule was so busy that they would not be able to meet for a personal visit with their pastor. The main comments and concerns that people had on the survey were that they would want to have enough time or notice to clean up their house and make it presentable if the pastor was coming over. Over and over people commented that they would not appreciate an unannounced visit from the pastor. That would make them uncomfortable. However, WELS members said that they did want to meet with their pastor, and they reported lots of benefits to meeting personally with him. Even though only 28% of WELS members said that they “very much enjoy” having people over to their home (a ranking of 5), 47% of WELS members said that they would be “very comfortable” (a ranking of 5) having their pastor over to their home. Please compare the two graphs below. Even though not everyone was thrilled about entertaining in general, WELS members reported that they were on average very comfortable having their pastor over to their home.

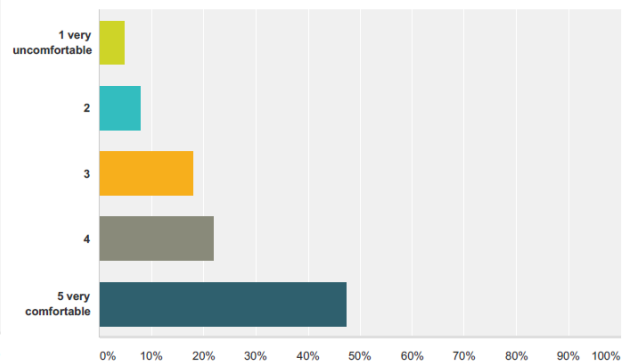
Q4 On a scale of 1 to 5, how much do you enjoy having people over to your home?

Answered: 363 Skipped: 11



Q5 On a scale of 1 to 5, how comfortable would you be having your pastor over to your home?

Answered: 355 Skipped: 19



Another trend I noticed is that people who responded that they were “very busy,” were more likely to want to have the pastor visit with them in his office or at church (35%) or in a community location (24%) than at their home (21%). But even 71% of the people who also said they have “busy schedules” thought that it was at least moderately important (chose 3 out of 5 or higher) for a pastor to visit them outside of just small talk at church. People want to get to know their pastors, and they want their pastors to get to know them. 75% of all WELS members surveyed ranked at least 3 on a scale of 1-5 saying that it was important for their pastor to get to know them personally outside of the Sunday service. One member commented, “I would actually very much enjoy entertaining my pastor and his family. I consider them friends. I know they genuinely care about all aspects of my life--not just church life. And vice versa.”

The biggest obstacles that people commented about were the size of their house, the cleanliness of their house, and their concern that the pastor already has enough to do. The members understood that conducting regular visitation would take time away from other pastoral duties, and they sympathized with that, but they also saw the benefit of being able to have specific personal visits with their pastor. It was really neat to see that 39% of members said that the one reason that they might decline a visit with their pastor is that they already have a great relationship with him (See Appendix I Question 7). However, in the comments on this question about reasons for declining visits, several people mentioned that they simply would not decline a visit from their pastor. Even if a pastor was a little bit worried about inconveniencing his busy people by meeting with them outside of the Sunday morning worship time, it might be helpful to remember that most of the time even an aggressive number of visits to a member is once per year. It is really not that intrusive to request to meet with people in their homes for one hour a year. People want personal visitation. The pastor and church have an opportunity to reach out to people who increasingly feel lonely and isolated with the comforting personal message of the gospel. It might take a while to get something scheduled, but with persistence and hopefully some assistance, pastors can make it work if it is a priority for them in their ministries. We will look at specific ways to schedule and conduct member visits in the next section.

Strategies for Member Visitation

We have seen that some of the obstacles to visitation are real. People see themselves as busy, and scheduling is difficult, especially if the pastor is trying to schedule everything himself.

However, the assumption that members don't want their pastor to visit them is just not universally true in the WELS. How can a pastor meet with his people and minister to them personally and purposefully? This chapter is a compilation of strategies that I gathered from personal interviews with pastors and various books and articles about pastoral ministry. Much of the advice also comes directly from comments from the survey that 88 WELS pastors filled out. The most pertinent survey question for this chapter was the open ended question 8: "Please describe your strategy for conducting non-crisis member visits in this church. (You could include strategies for setting up visits and/or strategies for making the actual visit more meaningful)." I will start this chapter with strategies for setting up member visits, beginning with passive scheduling and moving into active scheduling. Then I will give positives and negatives for the best places to meet with members. Finally, I will share some advice for how to make the home visit itself purposeful and productive.

Passive Strategies

These first sets of visitation strategies take a more passive role in setting up meetings by either letting congregation members take the first step or trying to be in the right place at the right time.

Plan to meet members in the community

Some pastors advocated simply being present at events in the community that congregation members are involved in. They made the following suggestions: Go to high school football games and Special Olympics hockey. It can mean a lot to people when you show that you care about their lives outside of the church walls. If people are too busy to meet because of their after-school activities, you could bring your family to one of those activities and chat with members in the stands. Take your car to the mechanic member who hasn't been at church for a while. Make it a point to go through the line of the teenage member who works at Kohl's. However, a number of pastors pointed out that, in most cases, they would not consider it "pastoral visitation" if they are not sharing God's word.

Attend social activities

Another way to get to know members is to accept their social invitations. One pastor said that he gets sometimes invited to watch football games on Sunday afternoons at members' homes. He gave this advice: Go ahead and root for the home team with your members. (Or

make it a friendly rivalry and root for the Packers anyway). Others advised: Attend the fellowship events that your church puts on. Have a beer with your neighbor in the garage if it makes sense in your community. Go to baptism and confirmation parties and get to know the extended families of your members. The pastor's presence will show that he cares, and people will become more comfortable being around their pastor in social situations.

Put out a sign-up sheet

A very popular way that pastors said they set up their member visitation program is by posting a schedule at church so that people can sign up for a home visit. This is relatively easy for a pastor to do and doesn't take any extra "active scheduling" other than leaving open slots in his schedule and confirming times with his members. Many pastors then promote the "every member visit" sign-up sheet at church and let the congregation know that they want to see everyone in their homes. One pastor said, "Sign up for a time that works for you, or I'll just show up at your house at time that works for me!" Pastors have also helped to make pastoral visitation feel normal for the congregation by publicizing open time slots for visitations on the monthly church calendars.

The drawback of all of these passive strategies where the members come to the pastor to set up the visitation is that often, a pastor will only get the most active and involved members to sign up. It is important to get to know these people too, but ideally a pastor will want to know his whole flock personally. Passive strategies do not always work well for scheduling visits with every member.

Active Strategies

The next set of strategies for pastoral visitation involves the pastor taking a more active role in setting up visits.

Drop by unannounced

According to my reading about the history of pastoral visitation, it seems like the standard way to visit people 75 years ago or more was to just pay a visit to their homes unannounced. According to the results of the member survey, this method may do more harm than good today. Many people said that they were very comfortable having their pastor in their home, but they really appreciated advanced notice. They wanted to be able to clean up the

house, and they wanted the visit to fit with their family schedule. It felt rude to them and made members nervous if a pastor stopped by unannounced.

In general, the research showed that members do not want unannounced visits, but are there some times when an unannounced visit might be the way to go? Some pastors mentioned that with older members, who they know will appreciate the visit, they will just stop by. With members who have not been active in church and are avoiding contact with the pastor, sometimes an unannounced visit is the only way for a shepherd to seek out the straying sheep. In this context, one pastor commented that he drops off mail from the church as a way to connect with straying members:

Don't make appointments. People can't skip out on you that way. Don't ever talk to them about not coming to church. You are dropping off their big pile of church mail. Both of you already know why you are there. Instead, spend the time taking a genuine interest in their lives. Look for a way to turn the conversation toward spiritual things and a sharing of the gospel. Showing genuine care for people's souls brings them back to church, not heavy handed badgering about why they haven't been in worship.

An innovative young pastor commented that he connects with people at their front door any way he can. "I have two large and productive apple trees. They have allowed me to do door-front visits under the guise of gifting apples. (Including the wormy ones to delinquent members with horses.)" If people invite you inside to talk more, great, take them up on it. If the conversation ends at the doorstep, that's fine too. The pastor had an opportunity to let them know he cared about them, and they might be receptive to setting up a visit in the future at a more convenient time.

Have people over to your home

Another strategy that some pastors mentioned was the "reverse home visit" where the pastor invites a member over to his own home. Mission pastors who don't have a church office said they often have people over for meetings and to get to know members. One pastor in a major metropolitan area has members over for dinner once a week. They have family devotions and get to know each other. This has meant a lot to some members who have felt isolated in the city and who hardly ever get together in other people's homes. Pastor Steinberg in Milwaukee

tries to have church leaders over to his home for meetings from time to time to facilitate relationship building and to give the meeting a less institutional feel.⁵³

Do every member visits

Probably the most well-known strategy for conducting regular pastoral visits is the “every member visit.” In the every member visit, the pastor generally shares with the whole congregation that he will be visiting every family within the next set amount of time. If possible, the gold standard of the every member visit seems to be to visit each person in the congregation every year. To achieve this, the pastor must decide this is a priority in his ministry and dedicate extra time to visit each person. Many pastors employ this method of visitation when they begin pastoring a new congregation. Pastors said that it is a good way for a pastor and congregation member to get to know each other personally and quickly. However, some pastors have also been burnt out by the daunting nature of the every member visit, especially if they have attempted it in large congregations. Some have told me, “Yeah I did that once when I got here, it was really tough. I’m never going to try that again.”

However, a number of pastors do still revisit the every member visit. Most did not report doing this every year, but they planned to do these visits every 3-4 years. Once a pastor has visited every member in their home at least once, they can keep up on visits by also visiting any new members and transfers in their homes. If members are not as engaged as they once were in church attendance or if a pastor senses that they need to talk to someone, it is easy to just say, “Hey, I’m visiting everybody, can we set up a time to catch up?” Geoff Cortright is the pastor of a small church in Vancouver. He said that he feels strongly about regularly having personal visits with the teens in his church. He feels that it is important to get to talk with them one on one and encourage them to show that he cares about them. He said these conversations don’t work as easily in groups because teens aren’t always as open with him in front of their peers or their parents.⁵⁴

Put visitation onto the weekly schedule

Rather than take on the rigorous task of visiting every member every year, some pastors simply put member visitation on their schedule for 1-2 times per week, and they made it a

⁵³ Paul Steinberg, Phone Interview, October 22, 2015.

⁵⁴ Geoff Cortright, Phone Interview, October 20, 2015.

priority to fill these time slots. They were not as concerned about getting through the whole congregation in one year. Instead, they took their time systematically visiting members on an ongoing basis. Other pastors mentioned that they chose a specific number of visits for the year, and they regularly scheduled visits to meet that goal. Based on my research and conversations, these are manageable methods that I would recommend. Pastors will escape the pressure of seeing every family in a short time frame, yet they will still systematically work through the whole congregation. Pastors will have regular opportunities to personally connect with people and to hear and remember their stories. The pastor will continue to have regular opportunities to personally assure his people of the forgiveness and love that Christ has for them, and he will be able to remind them of their importance in the church.

How could a pastor organize his regular visits? Some pastors begin their ministry at a congregation with an every member visit, and then they continue to conduct home visits with prospects and new members. One pastor commented, “For those whom I have visited as prospects (who become members), I find they are very willing and happy to have you stop over.” Others focus on the less active members of the congregation first and then move to the more regular members. If there is a person that they don’t know as well and feel like it would be important to build up their relationship, that member becomes a higher priority to visit. Many pastors are not as worried about active members falling away, so they focus first on the less active and less integrated. One pastor said he organized his visitation schedule like this, “I look first towards the delinquents or the “fringe” members of the congregation and focus on scheduling visits with them first. I generally have about 4-5 families on my list to schedule with. Once I have them scheduled, I add new families to my list and keep cycling through the membership that way.” A retired pastor told me that he used to try to schedule a visit to a straying member between visits with active encouraging members. Then he would get built up before and after making a difficult call on a member who was not as interested in meeting with him.

Pastors have also done regular personal visitation in connection with Bible studies. One pastor reported small group Bible studies as positive relationship building activities. He also hosted a small group study at his home. Others float around and attend other small groups in members’ homes. Many pastors make it a point to meet with all of the families of catechism students in their homes during the summer before classes start for the year. One pastor said that

praying through the church directory helps him decide who to call up for a visit. However a pastor decides to organize his visits, he will be blessed by regularly seeing his members, sharing Jesus with them, and receiving encouragement from them.

Set Up Strategies

Call people yourself to set up visits

Once a pastor has planned out a strategy for who he will visit and how often, it is important to ask, “What is the best way to contact members to set up a visit?” Some pastors try to set things up on Sunday by talking with people before or after church, but that can be difficult because of the rush of people coming in or out of the worship service. One pastor said that he calls people on the phone to offer to take them out to Starbucks since he has trouble getting people to make and keep appointments. Another said, “I give them a call, or send an email with 2-3 options for days and times that work for my schedule and go from there.” One veteran pastor calls or visits people near days that are special to them like birthdays and wedding anniversaries. I personally think that it would be a neat strategy to slowly pray through the church directory. Then a pastor could call the people he is praying for and ask them if they have any special prayer requests or if they would like a home visit. These set-up strategies where the pastor sets up visits himself could work well in a small congregation, but in a medium to large congregation many pastors saw huge benefits in having others help them set up visits.

Get help up setting up visits

After all my conversations with pastors, the best set up strategy that I learned about was having a coordinator help set up visits for the pastor. Many pastors who focus on visitation find it invaluable having a volunteer or a staff member who can help set up visits for him. Pastors that I spoke with agreed that setting up visits and coordinating schedules with members can take incredible amounts of time. However, if a coordinator knows the pastor’s schedule and preferred meeting times, they can contact members and set up visits for the pastor.

This strategy works very well at CrossWalk Church in Phoenix, AZ where pastoral visitation is an important part of ministry. At CrossWalk, pastors and staff ministers regularly visit with members in their homes, twice a week on average. Pastor Jeff Gunn said that Christians are designed to live in community. They should be connected to each other and connected to Christ. Pastor Gunn recognized that culture is busy and that some people tend to

isolate themselves, but he said that it is the job of the church to create its own culture. The gospel has always been counter cultural. He sees personal visitation as a vital way to connect people with Christ and to keep them informed about and connected with their church. Pastor Gunn said that he would never be able to keep up with personal visitation without Debbie Wagner, a lay member with a background in business, human resources, and volunteer coordination. One way that Debbie volunteers her time at church is by calling, emailing, and texting church members to set up visits for the pastoral team at CrossWalk.

In a phone interview with Debbie, she said that she has access to Pastor Gunn's online calendar and knows when he is available for visits. (6:30 at night seems to be the best time for people in their neighborhood, as it is before bedtime for kids yet after supper time). Instead of asking members about times that work for them, Debbie offers 2 different time slots for each of the two pastors and asks members if they are able to make any of those times work. When I talked to Debbie in October 2015, she had visits scheduled out with members for the next 3 months. Debbie tries to email members with the available times and then calls them a few days later, after they have hopefully been able to look over their schedules. A week or two before the visit, Debbie will call or text the family with a reminder about the visit to confirm that it will still work to meet.

Debbie said that sometimes people are nervous about meeting with a pastor. She explains that the pastors just want to get know them personally and talk more about the mission, vision, and values of their congregation. She also lets people know that the pastors want to get feedback about the church from members. Debbie said that when people know the intent and the agenda of the visit, even people who were nervous actually get excited to meet with the pastor. They know that the church cares about them personally. She also explains that the pastor would like to meet them in their homes and that he is glad to travel to them. Amazingly, she said that 98% of members choose to have their pastors visit them in their homes, even though they also give the option of meeting in the church office or at a public location.

Not everyone agrees to set up a meeting with the pastor. Debbie said that some will consistently say, "None of those times work. Call me back in a few months." So she makes a note, lets the pastor know, and plans to call them back again later.⁵⁵ Pastor Gunn said that obviously, sometimes, as a shepherd who cares, you just have to show up at someone's house

⁵⁵ Debbie Wagner, Phone Interview, October 26, 2015.

and check in on them. Pastor Gunn did admit that home visitation is counter cultural. People are busy and some are inclined to isolate themselves. But the job of the church is to create its own culture and break down those barriers. He gave this advice: Once you decide that you believe home visitation is important, make it a part of your church culture, and then get help setting up visits.⁵⁶

The next step in personal member visitation, especially in a large church, is to enlist the help of volunteers from the congregation to assist with the visitation itself. One pastor said, “While pastoral visitation is good, what about equipping Christians to minister to each other? Relying on a model where the pastor does all the visitation will limit his ability to do work and also limit the growth potential of the congregation.” This member-led visitation is not something that I will focus on very much in this paper, but in a paper called “Mechanics of Member Visitation,” Pastor Zarling gives one model for how to include lay members in member visitation. He encourages the pastor to first train and build up members by conducting a Bible study focusing on God’s Word and Jesus’ example to encourage perspective volunteers. Then the pastor can train these visitors by having them shadow him. Zarling advises having lay members scheduling their visits after the pastor gives them a list of names to contact. He admits there are some visits that should probably remain the responsibility of the pastor, but as members visit each other, individuals will still feel like they are cared for by the church and that their voices are being heard in the church. If there are specific concerns that come up that a member needs to talk about with their pastor, then a follow up meeting can be scheduled with him.⁵⁷

Where?

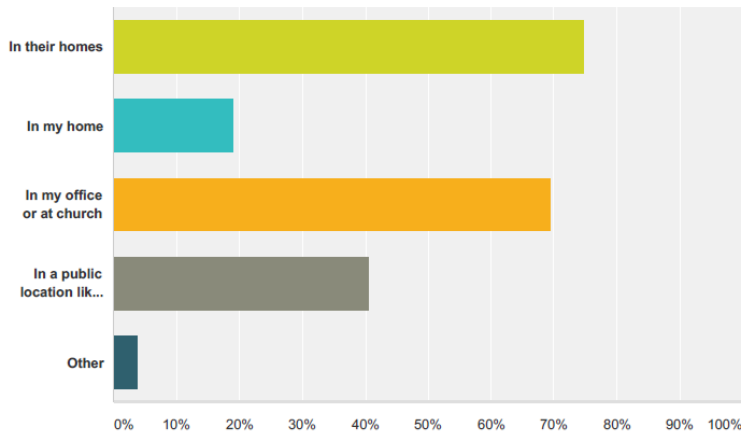
Where is the best place to meet? In the survey for pastors, I asked pastors where they most often met with their members and gave the following options: In the member’s home, in the church office, at a community location like a coffee shop, or at the pastor’s home. The most frequently chosen location for pastors was in their members’ home (81%). In a close second was in their office or at church (71%).

⁵⁶ Jeff Gunn, Phone Interview, October 20, 2015.

⁵⁷ Zarling, “The Mechanics of Member Visitation” 3-5

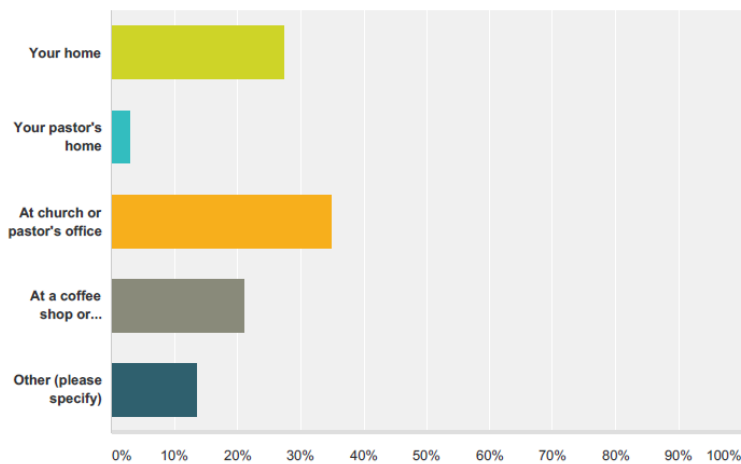
Q6 Where do you primarily meet with members? Check all that apply

Answered: 79 Skipped: 9



Q8 Where would you be most comfortable meeting with your pastor?

Answered: 412 Skipped: 64



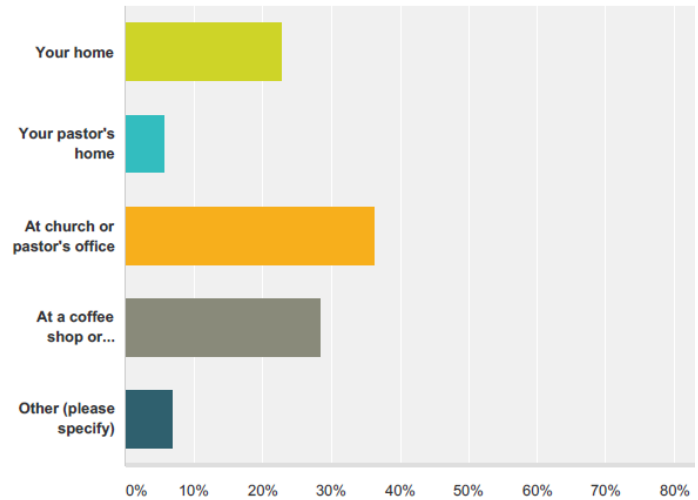
I also asked members in their survey, “Where would you be most comfortable meeting with your pastor?” 35% said “at church or pastor’s office.” 27% were most comfortable at their own home, and 21% selected that they would be most comfortable “at a coffee shop or community location.” One pastor summed up what many pastors mentioned to me, “When setting up a visit, I try to put the ball in the member’s court. I’ll say that we can meet at the church or somewhere public or in their home, wherever they feel most comfortable.” Let’s look at the positives and negatives of each location.

Coffee shop/ community location

Some pastors said that in their experience, young people, new members, and prospects seem to prefer to meet in public locations rather than at their homes. In my conversations with young professionals, some said that they were more comfortable meeting at a coffee shop because they lived in one bedroom apartments that they were not proud of entertaining in. According to my survey, people under age 35 were more comfortable meeting in community locations than in their homes (see graph on left). Pastors also advised meeting with single women in public locations or at the church office rather than visiting them alone in their homes. Overall, public places can be a great place to meet for basic get-to-know-you visits. They also work well if a pastor is visiting someone who is on a break from work. Some pastors said that they noticed that people who lived in major metropolitan areas seemed to be more comfortable meeting in public locations than in the home. One member commented that where you meet should depend on the

Q8 Where would you be most comfortable meeting with your pastor?

Answered: 176 Skipped: 25



stage of the relationship you have with your pastor. “Hey I hardly know you. I’m not ready to have you over to my house yet. Let’s just go get coffee or a beer first.”

However, meeting at a public location does have downfalls. Meeting with a pastor often involves deeper conversations about emotional issues. If a member breaks down in tears during a public meeting it can be uncomfortable for them and the others around them. The office or home would be a more appropriate and comfortable place for a release of emotions and for the pastor to give appropriate empathy and comfort. Another potential downfall to meeting in a coffee shop is that it can become pretty expensive for the hospitable pastor who always offers to buy a drink for the member that he is meeting with. It might be appropriate to add hospitality expenses into the church budget if congregation members are more open to meeting in public locations than in the home.

Office

Very few professionals give home visits any more. If a person is sick, they go to the doctor. The doctor doesn’t come to them. People are used to going to an office for a meeting. People don’t have to clean their homes to come to an appointment at church either. These might be reasons that people are more comfortable meeting with their pastor at his office or at church. Meeting at the church can feel like a sterile, less inviting environment if the pastor’s office is not set up for visitation. A pastor could think about furnishing his office to make it more comfortable for visits, or he could find another room in the church facility that is more inviting and comfortable. Another downside to personal visitation in the church office is that it can be tough to meet the whole family unit at the church office. However, 35% of people who took the member survey said that they would be most comfortable meeting their pastor “at the church or pastor’s office,” compared to 27% at their homes and 21% at a coffee shop or community location, so it should be an option for members to choose to remove barriers to personal visitation.

In an online article from *The Gospel Coalition* called, “Why Not Visit Their Workplace,” the author advocated that pastors should get to know their members by learning more about how they spend the majority of their waking hours, by visiting them at their workplace. Jesus got to know the world of the people he was talking to. He was a carpenter before beginning his public ministry. “Theologian R. Paul Stevens reports in his book *Work Matters* that 122 out of 132 public appearances of Jesus were in the marketplace... Out of 52 parables, 45 are set in the marketplace: fields, sheepfolds, vineyards, kitchens, palaces, courts, fisheries, and more.”⁵⁸ Some pastors make it a point to have regular meetings with their church leaders during their work lunch breaks, either at or near their offices.

Home

Pastors consistently commented on my survey that the home is the best place to get to know a person. They said it is easy for people to put on a mask on Sunday morning during the few minutes of small talk before or after a service. But in a home visit a pastor will get to know a person’s family and can have deeper conversations than he will usually get to on a Sunday morning or in a quick coffee shop visit. However, it takes building a certain amount of trust for people to be comfortable letting others into their homes. Some trust comes naturally with the office of pastor, but my research from the member survey showed that some members had negative past experiences with pastoral visits and were less receptive to the pastor coming over to their home. Pastors said that they intentionally let people know that they appreciate it when members allow them into their home and into their lives. Visiting in the home gives pastors an opportunity to show concern, and it is seen positively in most circumstances. 47% of WELS members said they were “very comfortable” with having their pastor over to their home. It is a positive experience for them. One pastor said that a home visit also gives pastors an opportunity to see people in a comfortable setting, and perhaps in a more relaxed frame of mind. Home calls build a sense of belonging and help people to identify with their pastor. They help pastors build their relationships with people and will help build up the whole body of Christ.⁵⁹ I will say more about the benefits of member visitation in the final chapter.

⁵⁸ Greg Forster, “Pastor, Why Not Visit Their Workplace?,” *TGC - The Gospel Coalition*, October 27, 2014, <http://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/pastor-why-not-visit-their-workplace>.

⁵⁹ Armstrong, *The Pastor-Evangelist in the Parish*, 27.

Strategies for Conducting the Visit

Getting to know people

What should a pastor do when he is invited into a home for a visit? Most of the pastoral theology books I read gave the practical advice that before entering the house, a pastor could begin with a prayer that God would bless his time as he visits his flock. Some pastors found it helpful to review the names of everyone in the family before the visit. A pastor could also look over his notes to see if there were special concerns or topics mentioned at a previous meeting.⁶⁰ Bonhoeffer, in his book, *Spiritual Care*, doesn't allow much time for small talk, socializing, or relationship building. He writes that the "pastor has one concern, the proclamation of the gospel. He may have a lot of other interests, but they do not belong in conversations concerned with spiritual care."⁶¹ While he's right that the most important aspect of pastoral ministry is the proclamation of the gospel, in my opinion and experience, it is easier to apply law and gospel to a person after you have taken some time to get to know them.

Some pastors shared questions that they ask members to learn more about them. "What are you passionate about? What causes you pain? How did you get to where you are and why do you stay there?" A helpful question to ask a married couple could be, "How did you meet?" It is a very safe open ended question, and it lets them tell their story together. It gives the pastor a glimpse into the couple's past and present, and their answers show how they interact with each other.⁶² One pastor who I interviewed said that he likes to ask members about the decoration on the walls of their homes. They are on display because they are proud of them. Sometimes he also uses these items to lead the conversation toward spiritual things. "Wow, look at that wedding picture! What church is that from?" A pastor could ask about the pictures on the wall and start to learn about the members' families. Are they close to them? Are they concerned about them? These are all conversations that a pastor can really only have on a home visit. They won't come up naturally in a coffee shop.

Pastor Ben Saddler shared this list of questions that he often weaves into conversations as he gets to know people. "Where are you from?" "What are your hobbies?" Then he asks a neutral question like, "Tell me about your church experience growing up." Finally he asks,

⁶⁰ David Murray, "A 'Normal' Pastoral Visit," *TGC - The Gospel Coalition*, June 1, 2010, <http://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/a-normal-pastoral-visit>.

⁶¹ Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. *Spiritual Care*. Translated by Jay C. Rochelle. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 45.

⁶² Paul Wendland, In-person conversation, September 2015.

“How can I help you get to know Jesus better?”⁶³ Pastor Joel Spaude does a holistic check-in, asking how people’s families are doing physically, financially, and spiritually.⁶⁴ One pastor commented in the survey that he seeks to learn about a person’s experience at the church. He asks, “1. How did you become a member? 2. What is your favorite memory at this church? 3. What is precious to you about this congregation? 4. How can we strengthen that? 5. What is one thing your pastor should give attention to? 6. What keeps you a member here? 7. Where do we go from here?”

Pastor Spaude reminded me not to make the visit feel like an interrogation. Don’t be in a huge rush to get to the next question on the list. If people are sharing their lives, allow them to share. The pastor will still want to steer the conversation a little bit, and certainly won’t let the conversation turn to gossiping.⁶⁵ Pastor Gunn shared this helpful acronym as a model for pastoral visitation: **LEADER**. **L**isten. **E**mpathize. **A**ffirm (what you can). **D**irect (give direction using God’s Word). **E**nlist (if you find out they might be interested in serving in some way). **R**efer (If you need to connect this person to a counselor).⁶⁶ Daniel Witte said in regard to straying members (but this applies for all people) that “Listening builds trust. Listening allows you to probe behind the excuses to the real issues. Listening gives you the ability to speak law and gospel specifically. The adage about why we have two ears but only one mouth surely fits here. Listen!”⁶⁷

Sharing the purpose for your visit

Pastor Zarling wrote in his essay on member visitation that early in the visit (or even when scheduling the meeting), it’s important to let people know why you are scheduling a meeting with them. Even if the purpose of the meeting is simply to get to know the members better, let them know. “I’m a new pastor here, and I really want to get to know my members so that I know how I can best serve them. Could I meet with you and your family next week?” Have a specific purpose in mind. Examples could include: Sharing the gospel, talking about their children and baptism, helping members open up about an issue that is bothering them, showing interest in their lives, opening lines of communication, and general encouragement in

⁶³ Ben Saddler, Phone interview, October 26, 2015.

⁶⁴ Spaude, Phone Interview.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Gunn, Phone Interview.

⁶⁷ Daniel Witte, “A Simple Strategy for Reclaiming Straying Members,” November 18, 1991, <http://essays.wls.wels.net/bitstream/handle/123456789/1185/WitteMembers.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>. 3

the Christian faith. A pastor could say, “We're here to show our interest in your life and talk about our church for a little while.” “We just want to keep the lines of communication open and give you a chance to talk about anything you might like to talk about in our church.”⁶⁸

Pastor Gunn convinced me that a good reason to meet personally with members is to discuss and help people to understand the mission, vision, and values of the church. He said that it lets people know and get involved with shaping the direction of the ministry of the church. He also advised that if a pastor is working on a long range plan with the congregation, seek input during pastoral visits.⁶⁹ Pastor Spaude said that it is important to make sure that everything is conducted in a transparent way. There don't need to be any planning secrets. Instill in people the fact that their opinions do matter. It is ok to talk about disagreements in the church, as long as everyone does it in a loving way. Pastors can assure people that they will take their concerns to the leadership of the church, but they can also remind members that the congregation will do whatever the majority of the people think is best. Pastor Spaude also asks that members will stand united with the ministry direction of the church; even if not everything goes the way they would like it to. Pastor Spaude observed that letting people know that their voice is heard and listening to their concerns will help create a sense of unity and teamwork within the church. It might also help single women or others who are shy to realize that their concerns and suggestions are also being recognized.⁷⁰ A pastor is called to help “prepare God's people for works of service (Ephesians 4:12).” A pastor can use personal visitation to learn about members' interests and skills so that he can give them opportunities to serve God through the church in the future.

Sharing God's Word

Members commented that they wanted to get to know their pastor as a regular guy who is normal like they are. Pastors also commented that they should get to know people on a social level. One pastor gave this advice: Show your members that you are a person just like they are. Maybe don't wear a suit and tie. You are a person who struggles with things just like they do, but you are also a person who cares deeply for them because you have been entrusted to watch over them as an under shepherd of the Good Shepherd. Let people know you are someone they

⁶⁸ Zarling, “The Mechanics of Member Visitation.”

⁶⁹ Gunn, Phone Interview.

⁷⁰ Spaude, Phone Interview.

can relax with, but also remember that you are their Lutheran pastor. They expect you to share God's Word with them. They expect you to comfort them and remind them of their Savior. Don't short change them.

In an article about visitation, Joseph Pipa gives the following suggestions for spiritual topics that could be brought up in a visit: Inquire about the spiritual well-being of the family. If children are in the home, visit with each of them first, and talk to them about Jesus. With adults, ask about how they are making use of the means of grace. How do they feel about their Bible reading, prayer lives, and family devotions? Are they profiting from the sermons? What struggles and temptations do they have? Do they have questions or concerns about the church? He also suggests that the pastor keep some records to help pray specifically for each person and to jog his memory next time he visits them.⁷¹

Think about asking questions like these: Is there anything you would like me to pray for? What do you find difficult about reading the Bible? Have you found any verses that are helping you to live life and prepare for eternity? What gifts do you think the Lord has given you? Do you feel the church is making the most use of your gifts? Do you think much about death and life after death? Do you feel prepared for that? How are you preparing? Are you facing any difficult challenges? Do you have any questions for me?⁷²

Let people know that finally, you're not really there to tell them your story, although you will share your life with them, but you are there to learn their story, to share Jesus' story, and to share how Jesus impacts our stories. Remind them that the congregation is not just a social club, but we're here to get to know Jesus.⁷³ Pastor Cortright tries to set up two meetings with prospects, one to hear their story, and one to share Jesus' story.⁷⁴ Some pastors said that they prepare a short devotion for each pastoral visit, and others simply apply God's word to whatever comes up in the congregation. One pastor told me that he crafts a devotional thought in connection with the text study he is working on for an upcoming sermon. Others prepared specific Bible studies on topics like unity in Christ and shared them at visits. Most pastors felt that after sharing God's word with their members, it was appropriate to end with a prayer. A pastor can ask the member if there are specific things that he can pray for on their behalf and

⁷¹ Joseph A. Pipa, Jr., "The Lost Work of Pastoral Visitation," *Reformation21*, August 2013, <http://www.reformation21.org/articles/the-lost-work-of-pastoral-visitation.php>.

⁷² Murray, "A 'Normal' Pastoral Visit."

⁷³ Sadler, Phone interview.

⁷⁴ Cortright, Phone Interview.

close the visit with prayer. The pastor will also personally be able to continue specifically praying for that member long after the visit.

Benefits of Member Visitation

Yes, there are obstacles to member visitation and some of them are real. But we have also seen that some obstacles might be more stereotypes than anything else. God's people want God's called worker to know them personally. God wants the shepherd to know the sheep personally, but pastors do not just visit their members out of a sense of obligation or duty. Member visitation has some great benefits for both the congregation and the pastor personally. In this chapter, we'll look at benefits that WELS pastors have experienced for themselves as a result of member visitation, and we will also discover benefits for the entire congregation based on survey results and comments from pastors and congregation members. I will also reference what others have written in books and articles about the benefits of personal visitation.

I wanted to learn about real current benefits that WELS congregations were experiencing as a result of member visitation, so this section draws heavily upon comments from my surveys that 88 pastors and 476 members filled out in October and November of 2015. On question 8 of my online survey, (see Appendix II) I asked pastors to write in, "What are the benefits you have observed from regular member visitation?" All quotations that are not specifically cited in this section are quotes from WELS pastors who answered this question anonymously. I also gathered information about potential benefits for congregation members by asking question 6 on the member survey (see Appendix I): "How important is it for a pastor to visit you personally outside of just small talk at church? Use a scale of 1 to 5." Then I also offered a comment box saying, "If this is somewhat important to you, what benefits do you think would come from this sort of visit?" These comments from the member and pastor surveys were my primary source of information for this section of the paper. My analysis of the responses showed that many of the benefits that pastors experience from personal member visitation will also be experienced by the members individually and the congregation as a whole. I also learned that there are a wide variety of benefits that result from regular member visitation. In this section, I will highlight the reoccurring themes that were mentioned by pastors and members. I discovered that pastoral visitation strengthens relationships in a congregation, provides an avenue for personal gospel ministry, promotes unity, and strengthens other areas of ministry in a congregation.

Visitation Builds Relationships

Increased trust and relationship building

The first benefit that most pastors and lay members mentioned from a non-crisis personal visit was that the relationship between member and pastor gets stronger. When a pastor starts to learn about the details of a person's life, he can pray specifically for them and their real needs and struggles. He will make it a point to check in on how things are going for them. When they see each other again, they will have more to talk about than the weather. One pastor commented, "You really get to know your members through private visits. Before and after church, people don't really want to get into deep detail about their lives. You also get a chance to see what is really important to them. They show you their home; you meet their pets; you get to know about their careers and accomplishments, their hobbies, and extended families. All of this is good." When a pastor can establish some connections with his members it also helps him to remember them better. This is especially helpful for the pastor of a large congregation. Congregation members also consistently commented on the survey that having a pastoral visit would help them to be able to relate to the pastor. They would see that he is a regular person too who struggles with life and needs to keep returning to God's Word for cleansing and strength.

Personal visitation promotes deeper relationships. Families meet together in their homes. When pastor and member are able to do this, it is a great picture of the family relationship that God has given us in Christ. A pastor wrote, "We're close. I know them better. They know me better. We truly are a family in Christ Jesus. I am not just the guy who tells them the Law and Gospel on Sunday and teaches about God's Word. I'm the guy who cares and is truly interested and invested in their lives. This is a huge bonus." When people know that they care about each other, they are able to trust each other more. Many of the pastors talked about increased trust between member and pastor as a result of visitation.

That trusting relationship opens up more opportunities to bring God's Word to members in their individual situations. People will go to their pastor more quickly if something is wrong because they trust him. People are also more likely to confess sins to a person they trust. This gives the pastor an awesome opportunity to proclaim the gospel and personally forgive people for their sins as a called servant of Jesus.

"Such relationships become great blessings when there is a crisis or the need for some sort of counseling arises. You're not just the pastor whom they see once a week (if that)

and who barely knows their name. They come to realize that you're someone they can turn to when they need help and guidance from God's word. The better the relationship, the more likely they are to pick up the phone and say, "Pastor, I was wondering this... Pastor, I need some help with that... Pastor, this is the situation I'm facing. What should I do?"⁷⁵

Knowing that the church and pastor care

Personal visitation shows members that the church and the pastor care for them. This benefit was mentioned over and over by members and pastors alike. Members are reminded that they are more than just people who fill the pews on Sunday mornings. Pastors observed that members of large churches especially need to know this. A member of a large church mentioned that sometimes they feel like they just fade into the background. They felt discouraged and were sometimes tempted to stop coming altogether.

Debbie Wagner, who coordinates the pastoral visitation at CrossWalk Church in Phoenix said that overall, pastors can only shake so many hands on Sunday. They can't get to know everyone in that short amount of time, so they make pastoral visitation a priority. She said, "People just want to know they count." Even if the people she calls are not able to schedule an in-home visit, the phone call itself lets them know that they are a valued member of the congregation, and that is a really important thing.⁷⁶ "You have the chance to let people know how important they are to the body of Christ."⁷⁷

As a pastor visits people in their homes, he will also learn about members needs and how the congregation can assist them. As we live with our eyes fixed on heaven and our faith centered on Jesus, we can't help but also look out for the needs of those around us and let our light shine. Pastors can give their churches opportunities to express the love of Jesus to their own brothers and sisters who need help.⁷⁸

⁷⁵ Daniel Witte, "A Simple Strategy for Reclaiming Straying Members," November 18, 1991, <http://essays.wls.wels.net/bitstream/handle/123456789/1185/WitteMembers.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>, 4,5.

⁷⁶ Wagner, Phone Interview.

⁷⁷ Cortright, Phone Interview.

⁷⁸ Jonathan E. Schulz, "Lutherans and the Social Gospel" (Delegate's Conference, Denver, CO, 1987), <http://essays.wls.wels.net/bitstream/handle/123456789/3146/SchultzSocial.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y> 11.

Visitation is Gospel Ministry

Pastors can share law and gospel personally

A pastor wrote, “I feel more in tune with what's going on in the lives of members. It gives me a chance to see the dynamics of their home and to bring a personal Law and Gospel message.” This point was kind of a big realization for me. Pastors do most of their preaching and teaching to groups of people, from the pulpit and in the classroom. But how often do pastors get to personally assure people individually of God’s forgiveness and love for them in Christ? Certainly, a pastor gets to do this on evangelism calls and in Bible Information Class with new members. He will also have opportunities to personally reassure people of their forgiveness when they come to him for counsel when they are distressed. Nonetheless, a system of home visitation is such an amazing opportunity to tell the majority of the congregation members individually that they are valuable members of the family of God! Christ died and rose for them personally. In corporate worship, members hear these words spoken to each of them during confession and absolution. In a very personal way, they get to receive forgiveness in the Lord’s Supper. However, it seems that people rarely have an opportunity for individual, personal confession and absolution. A personal in-home program of visitation provides an awesome opportunity to personally share specific law and gospel with every member of the congregation. Pastors can sit across the kitchen table regularly with people who need to hear again and again that God has taken away all their sins. Visitation is a wonderful way to share the gospel.

Opportunity to encourage

One pastor commented that when a pastor is new at a church, doing his first round of visits, it is especially appropriate to ask people how often they come to church and Bible class. What do they consider to be “regular attendance?” Do they see the benefit in attending Bible study and sending their children to Sunday school? If not, a pastor could show them the value of regular worship and study. He could encourage members to stay connected to the word and sacraments. A pastor might find out that people don’t attend Bible study because they felt like the classes were boring or irrelevant to their lives. One member told me that she has trouble hearing the pastor during Bible study because he doesn’t use a microphone. Perhaps there are adjustments that the pastor could make that would help people in their worship lives. It is impossible for a pastor to know the answers to some questions unless he asks, and unfortunately,

sometimes there is not enough time to ask on a Sunday morning. At a home visit, a pastor can help people work through the barriers to regular worship and Bible study attendance and personally encourage them with the gospel.

Pastors can also encourage people in their personal devotional lives in an in-home visit. Pastor Degner wrote in a paper called *Encouraging Christian Education in the Home*, “We visit the sick, the troubled and the new prospect, but what about the regulars who are in church every Sunday? We could visit them more and include in our visits an encouragement to read the Bible in the home.”⁷⁹ A pastor could give some examples of how to read the Bible devotionally, or he could share resources that have been beneficial for his family or for other members. “Too often the main emphasis of an every member visit is financial; the encouragement to read the Bible is only casually mentioned as an important part of one’s stewardship time. We might be happily surprised how renewed interest in Bible reading would elevate the level of stewardship in giving, witnessing and hearing the Word.”⁸⁰

Personal faith strengthening

Finally, as pastors get to share God’s Word and see the faith of their members, their faith will be strengthened too. Think about Paul in Romans chapter one, longing to meet with the Roman Christians so “that you and I may be mutually encouraged by each other’s faith (Romans 1:12).” Paul and the Christians with him were also encouraged by the faith of the Thessalonians. “Therefore, brothers and sisters, in all our distress and persecution we were encouraged about you because of your faith. For now we really live, since you are standing firm in the Lord. How can we thank God enough for you in return for all the joy we have in the presence of our God because of you (1 Thessalonians 3:7-9 NIV11)?” Peter didn’t really understand his mission work among the Gentiles until God sent him on a home visit to Cornelius’ house. “This visit brought not only a great blessing to Cornelius but to Peter as well. Peter understood the meaning of the dream while he was in the house of Cornelius. This visit changed Peter’s perspective about

⁷⁹ S. Degner, “Encouraging Christian Education in the Home” (AZ-CAL Pastoral Conference, Phoenix, Arizona, 1978), <http://essays.wls.wels.net/bitstream/handle/123456789/1155/DegnerEncouraging.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>, 12.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

mission.”⁸¹ God will build pastors up as well and show them new ways to serve in their ministry contexts as they meet with God’s people and share his word.

Visitation is encouraging

One pastor wrote, “It’s just fun to keep in contact with people even if it’s for five minutes. People appreciate the fact that you care and are willing to take the time to visit with them.” Another said, “If people are willing, I find home visits to be very beneficial and enjoyable.” This has been my personal experience with member visitation. I really enjoy getting to know people. One pastor that I interviewed mentioned that if he was having a tough time in ministry and it seemed like nothing was going the way he wanted it to, he would try to schedule some time with a Christian brother or sister who would help build him back up.

Visitation Promotes Unity

Encourages a closer connection to church

“When we actively visit, members are more likely to be active in ministry. To put it neatly, to be involved in their lives creates a stronger connection and reason for them to be involved in church life.” Pastors reported that members were more likely to get connected with the church as a result of pastoral visitation. The pastor can also help to connect members to each other when they get to know families better. A newer member commented, “I’m fairly new at the church that I am attending so just getting to know them (the pastors) better would be great. Also, would give them an opportunity to get to know me better and maybe even put me into touch with other church members.” Another member also said that his or her connection to church would be strengthened by a pastoral visit. “I find it hard to get to know people with small talk; so if a pastor went out of his way to visit me for non-crisis reasons that would be very meaningful to me and encouraging to my faith and connection to the congregation.”

Helps with long range planning

Pastors told me that personal visitation is also useful for long range planning in a congregation. Before a pastor sits down and drafts out a congregational mission and vision statement, he needs to get to know his congregation and their strengths and interests. This will

⁸¹ N. Ashok Kumar, “The Pastoral Benefits of Visiting Church Members,” *Ministry Magazine*, October 2010, <https://www.ministrymagazine.org/https://www.ministrymagazine.org/archive/2010/10/the-pastoral-benefits-of-visiting-church-members>.

help the congregation as they plan out how to carry out their ministry. A pastor observed, “Pastors know their people. They are connected to their needs and gifts so that they can plan and coordinate useful ministry.” The pastor can visit with his members individually and ask them what they love about their church and what they dream ministry could be like. As he talks with more people, he is bound to see some themes emerge. He will also certainly notice people who are willing to serve in ways that he might not have expected. Pastors left the following comments about this: “You get to know your members better and get a better grasp for the ministry and you get a better idea of what types of ministry they want to focus on outside of the most important Sunday morning worship.” “It (pastoral visitation) has also helped me get the flavor of the congregation and see the direction people are hoping to go.”

Once the people have been consulted and their input has been gathered, the pastor and the leadership of the congregation can use that information for their long range (or even short range) planning. Pastor Spaude especially said that making the mission of the church personal to the members helps with the unity of the church. People have a one-on-one opportunity to voice their thoughts and concerns to the pastor. They will know that they are being heard, loved, and cared for. Pastor Spaude said that having good communication with the congregation creates less stress. It also keeps issues from ballooning out of control or creating an “us against them” mentality.⁸²

Once a pastor has sought input in the planning stages, then he will be ready (with the help of volunteers in the congregation) to also gather support for the plan. Sometimes that plan will involve financial support, for example, if the congregation is planning to add a staff position, expand their ministry, or start a building project. One pastor said that when his church was seeking to purchase land, the pastors visited the congregation members in their homes so that they could share information about the land purchase and ask how the members thought they could help. According to Pastor Thomas Schulz, the every member visit is one of the most effective ways to support a stewardship emphasis. Some congregations have chosen to meet in small groups for stewardship programs to support ministry for the church.⁸³ However, using this “cottage meeting” approach exclusively is one reason members reported they are sometimes

⁸² Spaude, Phone Interview.

⁸³ Thomas A. Schulz, “The Pastor As Stewardship Leader” (Arizona-California Pastoral Conference, Apache Junction, AZ, 2001), <http://essays.wls.wels.net/bitstream/handle/123456789/3448/SchulzStewardship.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>, 8.

wary about scheduling an in-home meeting with the pastor. A pastor should be careful not to always look for financial pledges on member visits.

A chance to ask questions

When pastors conduct member visits, it gives their congregations a chance to ask questions that they might not have opportunity to ask otherwise. Some members who responded to the survey thought they would be more willing to ask theological questions during a private home visit than in a group Bible study. One member wrote, “Our church has scheduled annual member visits at church in the past. It helps people feel valued and more connected. It also provides a great opportunity for members to ask questions they might not be able to ask in corporate settings.” Pastors agreed with this benefit of being able to ask questions. One pastor said, “The time together in their homes allows for extended discussion of personal issues and doctrinal questions.” Another pastor wrote, “Members often have questions that they don't want to ask in a large group setting. When I visit members in their home, they often bring up doubts or concerns or questions they have, and I am able to minister to them in a very personal way.”

If people have questions or concerns about the direction the ministry of the church, a pastoral visit is a great time to bring them up. A member commented, “I think it (pastoral visitation) would give a better idea of the pulse of the congregation. Some people are too timid to bring up their thoughts or objections in a formal congregational setting such as a Bible study or a voters meeting, but feel more comfortable in their own home one on one.”

Visitation Strengthens Other Areas of Ministry

Willingness to serve

Pastors and members said that when members feel more connected to the church and are empowered by the gospel, it often leads to more willingness to serve in the church. One positive aspect of member visitation is to simply share available service opportunities. A member commented, “It would be nice to have a visit to get caught up on what is going on at church. We don't attend many things outside of church because our kids are so young and it's not convenient. It would also be nice because maybe there is a way that is available for us to serve, and we need that extra push or encouragement.” One pastor said that when he meets with members and explains the congregational goals for ministry, people show a greater willingness to serve. They will let him know, “If you need help, give me a call.” There are some people, like stay-at-home

moms, who have amazing skills that they haven't been able to use since they left the public sector. A pastor could see if they would be willing to share those skills by volunteering in different ways for the church. Personal visitation can also be beneficial because people can give input about opportunities they see for the church to also serve in its community.

After reading through comments from members, I was reminded over and over that the church is full of faithful members who want to serve their Lord. Many of them serve regularly, and it is important for the visiting pastor to also remember to thank them for their service. A member commented, "Active members are just expected to keep things running smoothly for very long stretches of time with no "thank you" or positive reinforcement for the hours of time they continue to dedicate to the church. This is especially true for the women in our congregation." There are lots of ways to show appreciation. A home-visit to an active member might be one way of saying thank you for their service.

Visitation can prevent straying

People have been saying the old adage, "a house-going pastor makes a church-going people," for well over 100 years, and there might be some truth to it. Some pastors reported that it has been true in their ministry, but it is not a silver bullet or a promise from God that if you minister to people in their home, then church attendance will go up. In fact one pastor commented, "I do them (home visits) because I think it shows people that I care about them and their souls. It does not always translate into better church attendance. In fact, so far, pastoral visits haven't improved many of my members' church attendance." Pastor Cortright said that a home visit on a straying member is good for one or two return visits to church, but you have to have more of a plan in place than a once a year visit to encourage the straying to stay active in church.⁸⁴ On the other hand, one pastor said that the "home/coffee-shop going pastor" adage is incredibly true. Another wrote, "I think regular contact with members, in whatever form, is the encouragement they need to stay connected to Word and Sacrament."

Encourages evangelism

A couple pastors shared this warning with me as we were talking about pastoral visitation, "Don't focus so much on in-reach that you forget about outreach." It is a valid concern. Yet member visitation and evangelism are not mutually exclusive. Pastor Steinberg

⁸⁴ Cortright, Phone Interview.

said that one-on-one visitation with members is great practice for Bible studies and evangelism calls. If you accidentally make a fool of yourself, at least you only embarrass yourself in front of one person who you already have a relationship with.⁸⁵ A rookie pastor could get a confidence boost by sharing law and gospel presentations with members at his pastoral visits. Then he might be more sure of himself as he speaks God's word in the less comfortable setting of canvassing or prospect follow up. If a new pastor gets comfortable talking to his members and transitioning from small talk to spiritual conversations, he will be comfortable sharing God's word among prospects as well. Visitation can help evangelism! One pastor even told me that simply getting out of the office and into the community to visit a member is enough to kick start him into make some extra evangelism calls along the way too.

There are also opportunities for evangelism during a member visit. One pastor commented, "Many of my members are married to (mostly men) of a different faith or no faith, and these visits gives them the opportunity to see me and my concern for their spiritual welfare." Other pastors also shared that member visitation is also very helpful in cross cultural evangelism. "In my Hispanic outreach, I find visiting to be especially important. So, in my current situation, I spend a lot of time visiting Hispanic prospects and members in their homes. I rarely do so in English. I believe that personally visiting people in their homes is the most essential part of doing outreach in Spanish." A home visit could also be a good place help members identify their unchurched friends, relatives, and neighbors and to help them plan out how they can introduce those friends to the Savior.

Better preaching

One lay member wrote on my survey, "I think my pastor would be able to write more meaningful sermons if he knew more what my life was like." Many pastors agreed with that statement. A strong theme from pastors about the benefits of personal visitation was that it has made them better preachers. This is what pastors had to say: "I am able to understand their (my members') home situation. It helps my preaching because I'm preaching to real needs... I believe the congregation is more open to listen to guidance when they have a personal relationship with their pastor." "The better I know the people whom I am serving, the better I am able to preach and teach them God's Word. Sermons and Bible studies are able to be much more personal and

⁸⁵ Steinberg, Phone Interview.

applicable when I have been spending time with my people in their homes.” “I get to learn their life story - those things that shape who they are when I meet with them. I learn their interests and their struggles in life. It helps with catering a sermon specifically to my members.” Warren Wiersbe writes in *Preaching and Teaching with Imagination* that he was not convinced that pastoral visitation resulted in higher church attendance. But he was convinced that “a pastor with a shepherd’s heart..., who knows his sheep and loves them, will do a better job communicating God’s love and truth than the ivory-tower executive who, unlike Jesus Christ, has no time for people... Caring has to be modeled by the pastor, personally and from the pulpit.”⁸⁶

Of course, a pastor will not betray the trust of the people that he meets with by revealing anything specific in a sermon. However, in general, when a pastor knows what his people are struggling with, he can specifically preach and show how God’s Word gives answers and hope to the problems that his people face. “Although most of the time we should not preach on topics that members discuss with us during a visit (though sometimes members ask us to address certain topics), that visit will assist us as we plan our preaching schedule.”⁸⁷ I was personally able to practice this vicar year by at least making general statements in sermons like, “I know that many of you are concerned about your children and grandchildren who aren’t connected to God and his Word. Look how this text encourages us to reach out to them.” A pastor doesn’t have to rely on finding sermon applications in books or from the news when he knows the lives of his people. “There is no quicker way of bridging the gulf between preacher and people than meeting them in their homes.”⁸⁸

Conclusion and Encouragement

Based on the results of my interviews and surveys from WELS pastors and lay members, I believe that pastors can overcome the obstacles to member visitation in the 21st century. Personal visitation has been a challenge for pastors for generations, but the obstacles that the 21st century pastor faces are not insurmountable. If American culture has become more isolated and lonely, the church can create its own culture and turn those obstacles into an opportunities by

⁸⁶ Warren W. Wiersbe, *Preaching and Teaching with Imagination: The Quest for Biblical Ministry* (Ada: Baker Books, 1997) 26.

⁸⁷ N. Ashok Kumar, “The Pastoral Benefits of Visiting Church Members.”

⁸⁸ Pipa, Jr., “The Lost Work of Pastoral Visitation.”

reaching out and personally connecting with its members. If members feel busy and overwhelmed, the church can respond by sharing the perfect rest that Jesus offers in the gospel when he says, “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls (Matthew 11:28,29).” The pastor can also overcome the obstacle of member busyness by remembering that many members will appreciate the visit, and he will only be asking to take one night per year (often at most) out of a member’s busy schedule. He can also start to overcome his own busy schedule, especially in a large congregation, by getting help from a member who can schedule visits for him.

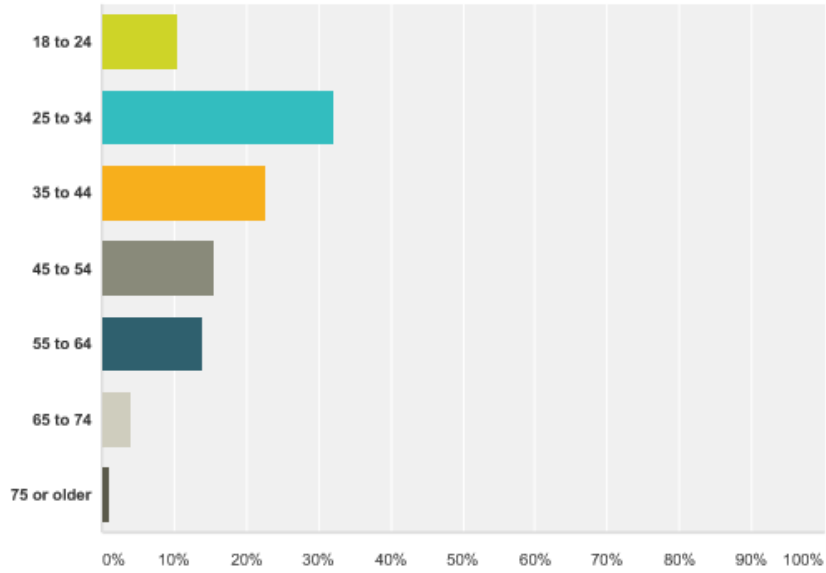
Based on the results of many surveys and interviews with pastors, I would recommend that if a pastor and congregation recognize the benefits of visitation, then they should prioritize it and create a plan for regularly meeting with members. Pastors said regular member visitation works best when a pastor works through visiting his whole congregation slowly and consistently rather than practicing member visitation in short energetic bursts. Whether he is the pastor of a large or small congregation, a pastor could consider putting member visitation on his schedule for 1-2 evenings per week. If his congregation is medium to large, he will most likely not see every member in their homes every year, but that is ok. He will still be consistently, personally encouraging his members and receiving encouragement from his members. He will continue to grow in preaching and teaching as he gets to know the real struggles and joys of his people. He can reflect Christ’s personal love as he builds relationships with Christ’s flock. I pray that pastoral visitation will be a joy for you as you serve the Chief Shepherd, and I leave you with this encouragement from Peter:

Be shepherds of God’s flock that is under your care, serving as overseers—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away (1 Peter 5:2-4).

APPENDIX I

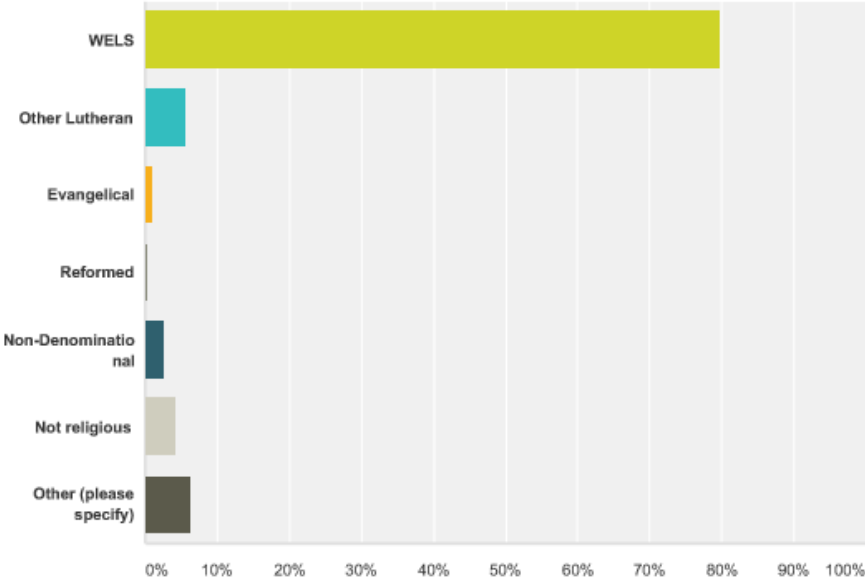
Member Survey Questions and Graphs

Q1 What is your age?



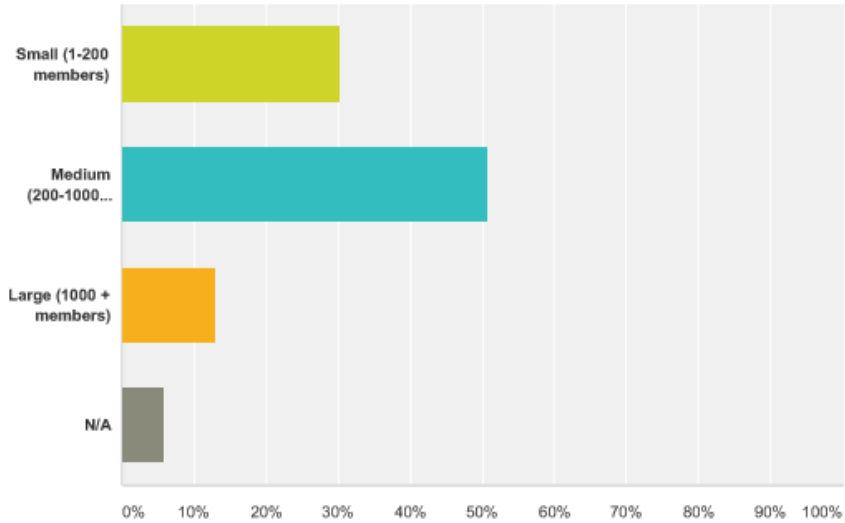
Answer Choices	Responses	
18 to 24	10.36%	49
25 to 34	32.14%	152
35 to 44	22.83%	108
45 to 54	15.64%	74
55 to 64	13.95%	66
65 to 74	4.02%	19
75 or older	1.06%	5
Total		473

Q2 What is your church affiliation?



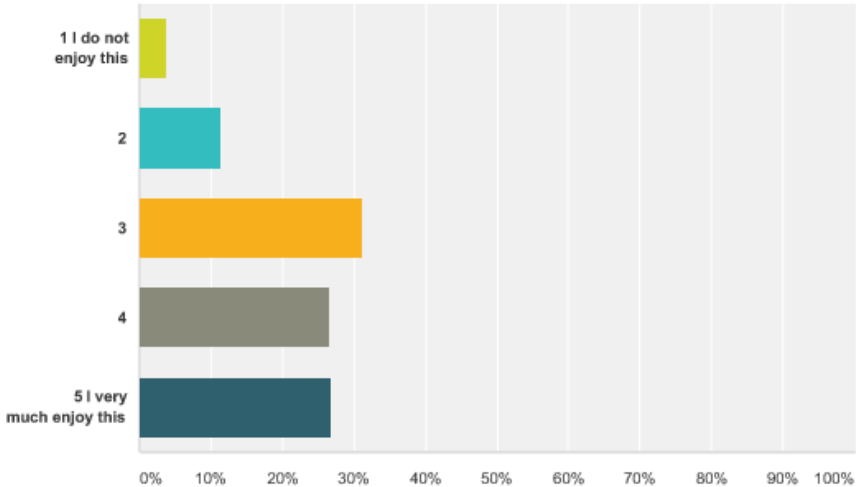
Answer Choices	Responses	
WELS	79.74%	374
Other Lutheran	5.54%	26
Evangelical	1.07%	5
Reformed	0.43%	2
Non-Denominational	2.77%	13
Not religious	4.26%	20
Other (please specify)	6.18%	29
Total		469

Q3 What is the size of your church?



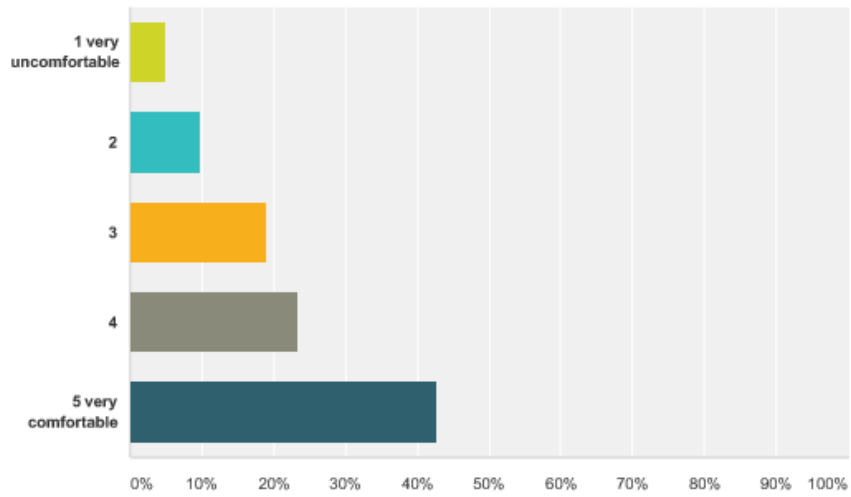
Answer Choices	Responses	
Small (1-200 members)	30.37%	140
Medium (200-1000 members)	50.76%	234
Large (1000+ members)	13.02%	60
N/A	5.86%	27
Total		461

Q4 On a scale of 1 to 5, how much do you enjoy having people over to your home?



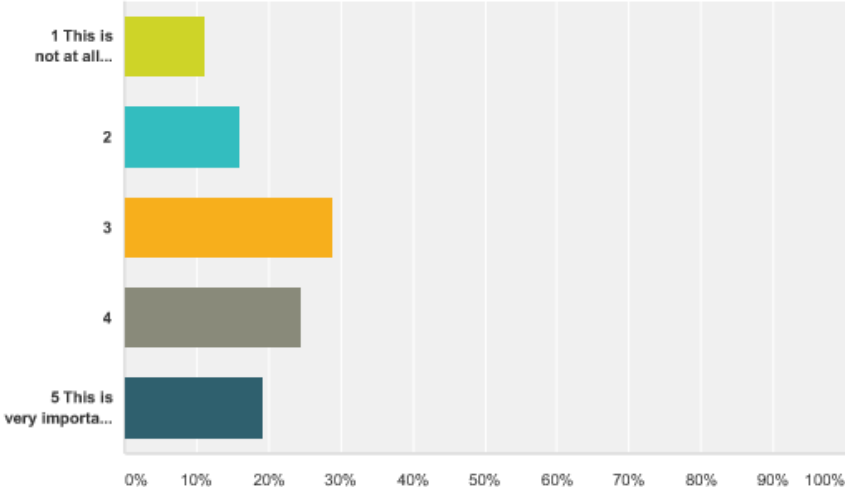
Answer Choices	Responses	
1 I do not enjoy this	3.77%	17
2	11.53%	52
3	31.26%	141
4	26.61%	120
5 I very much enjoy this	26.83%	121
Total		451

Q5 On a scale of 1 to 5, how comfortable would you be having your pastor over to your home?



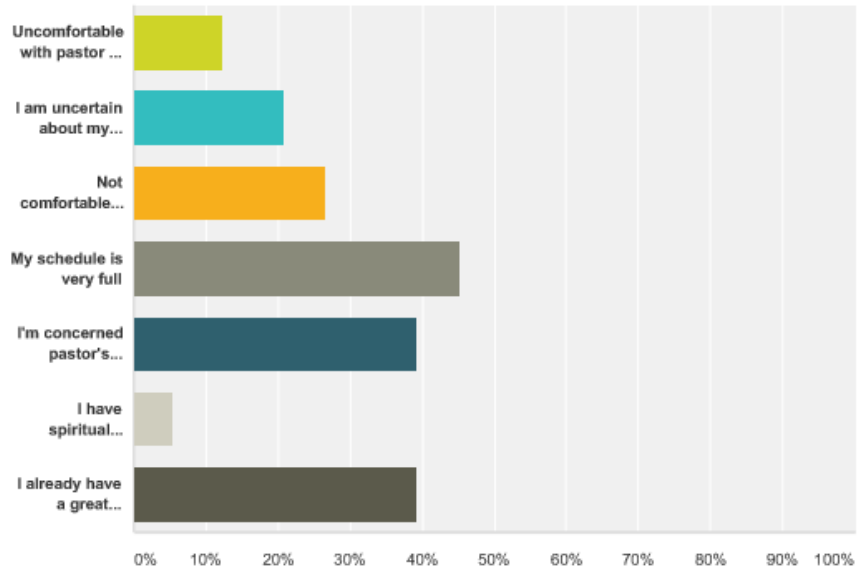
Answer Choices	Responses	
1 very uncomfortable	5.03%	22
2	9.84%	43
3	18.99%	83
4	23.34%	102
5 very comfortable	42.79%	187
Total		437

Q6 How important is it for a pastor to visit you personally outside of just small talk at church?
Use a scale of 1 to 5.



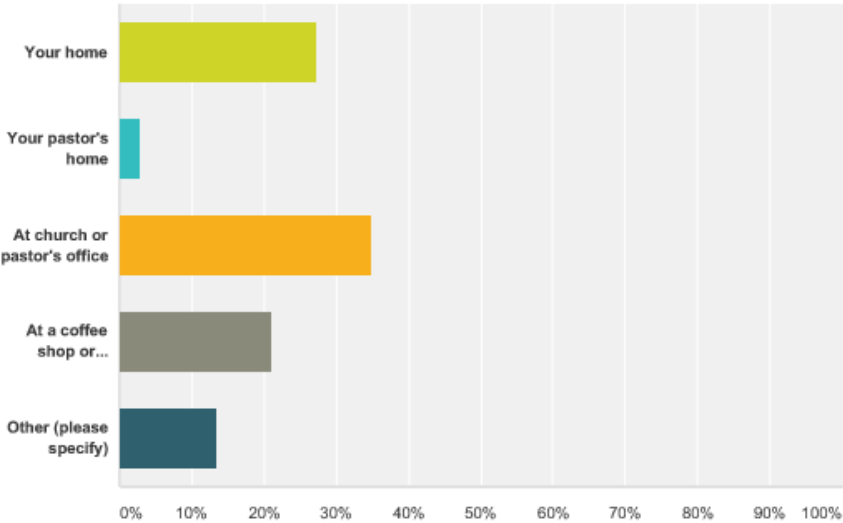
Answer Choices	Responses
1 This is not at all important	11.37% 49
2	16.01% 69
3	28.77% 124
4	24.59% 106
5 This is very important to me	19.26% 83
Total	431

Q7 What would lead you to decline or put off a home visit from your pastor? Check all that apply.



Answer Choices	Responses
Uncomfortable with pastor in my home	12.37% 48
I am uncertain about my relationship with my pastor	20.88% 81
Not comfortable with the state or size of my home	26.80% 104
My schedule is very full	45.36% 176
I'm concerned pastor's schedule is too full	39.18% 152
I have spiritual doubts or am worried I will get in trouble	5.41% 21
I already have a great relationship with pastor, he can spend time with someone else that may need his time more.	39.18% 152
Total Respondents: 388	

Q8 Where would you be most comfortable meeting with your pastor?



Answer Choices	Responses
Your home	27.43% 113
Your pastor's home	2.91% 12
At church or pastor's office	34.95% 144
At a coffee shop or community location	21.12% 87
Other (please specify)	13.59% 56
Total	412

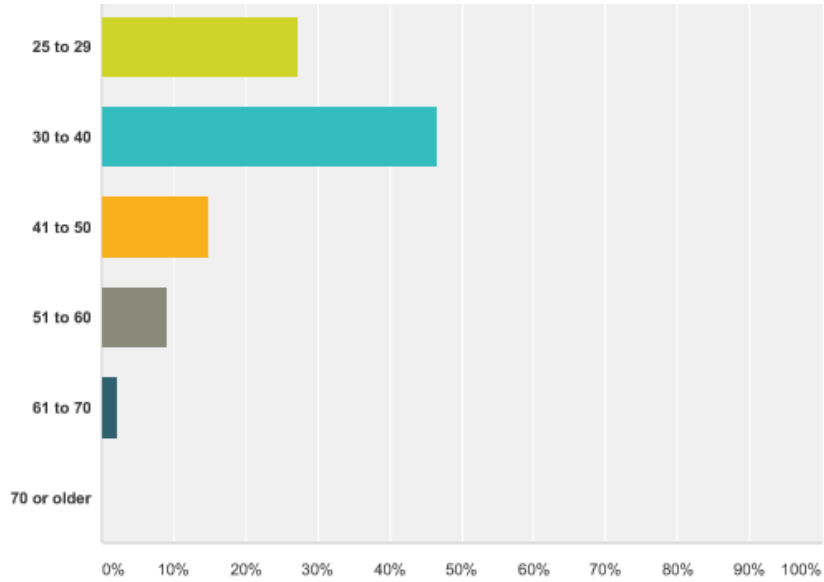
Q9 What should I have asked, but didn't, that you believe is important to my thesis topic? If you would like to talk more about this topic, please share your email address with me, and I will get in contact with you.

APPENDIX II

Pastor Survey Questions and Graphs

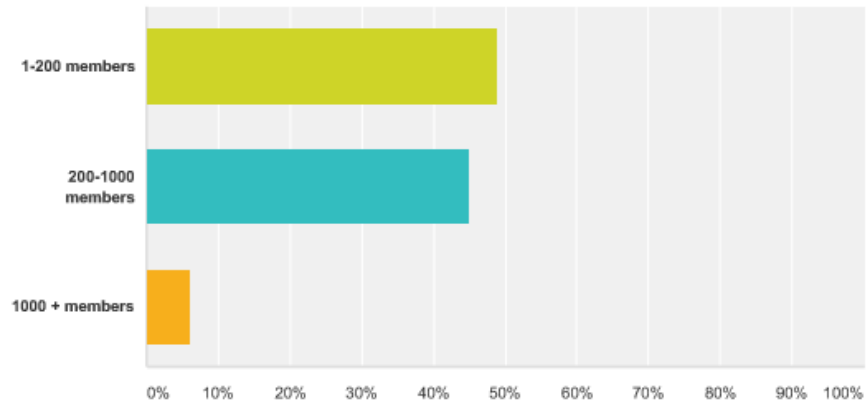
My paper seeks to explore the value of non-crisis relationship building visitation of pastors with members of their congregation. I also want to learn more about the obstacles that pastors face as they visit members and the ways to overcome those obstacles.

Q1 What is your age?



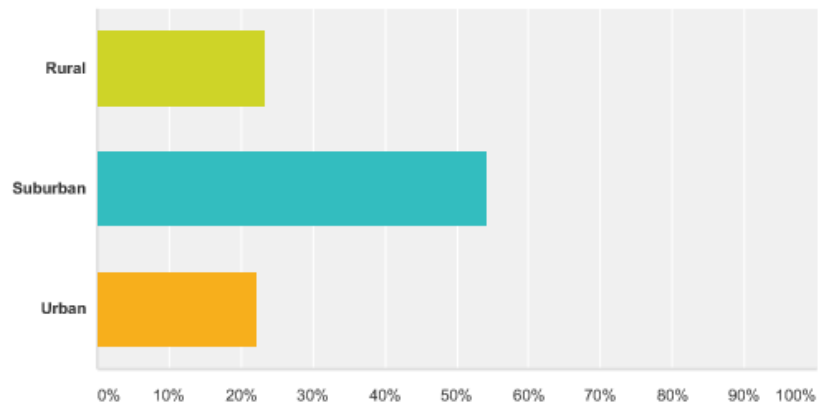
Answer Choices	Responses	
25 to 29	27.27%	24
30 to 40	46.59%	41
41 to 50	14.77%	13
51 to 60	9.09%	8
61 to 70	2.27%	2
70 or older	0.00%	0
Total		88

Q2 What is the size of your church?



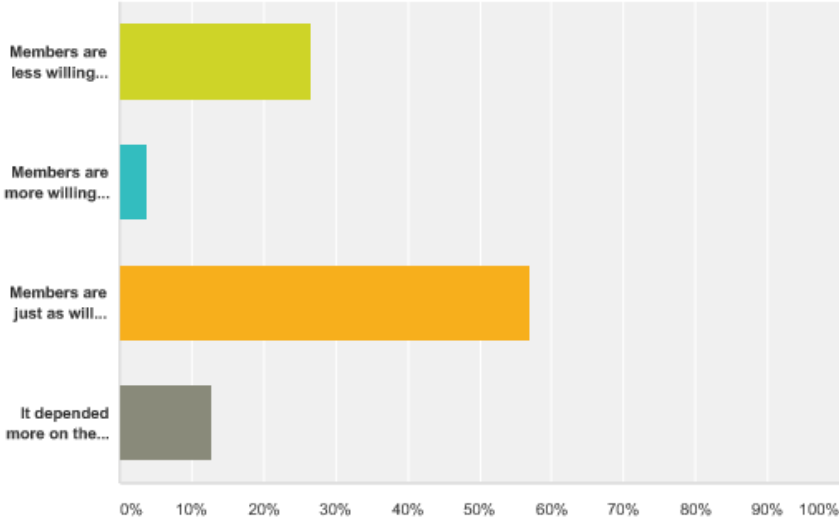
Answer Choices	Responses	
1-200 members	48.78%	40
200-1000 members	45.12%	37
1000 + members	6.10%	5
Total		82

Q3 Please describe the location of your church.



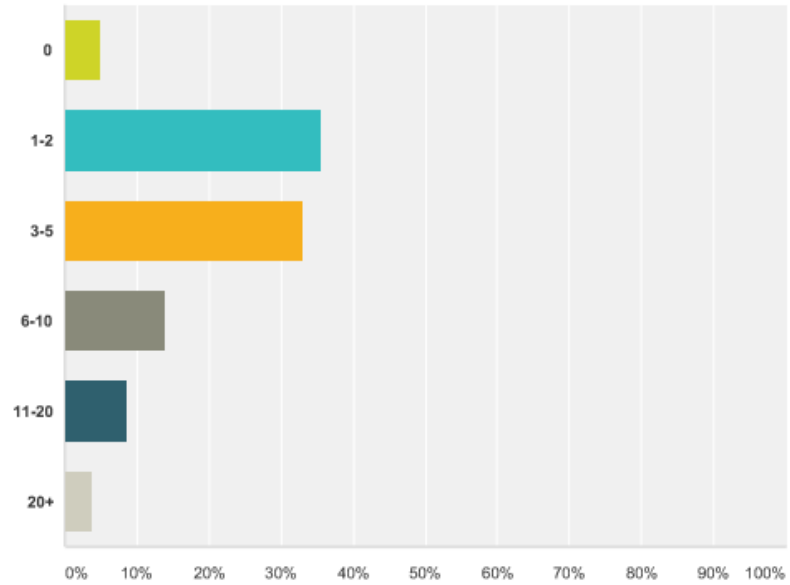
Answer Choices	Responses	
Rural	23.46%	19
Suburban	54.32%	44
Urban	22.22%	18
Total		81

Q4 How has member visitation changed during the course of your ministry?



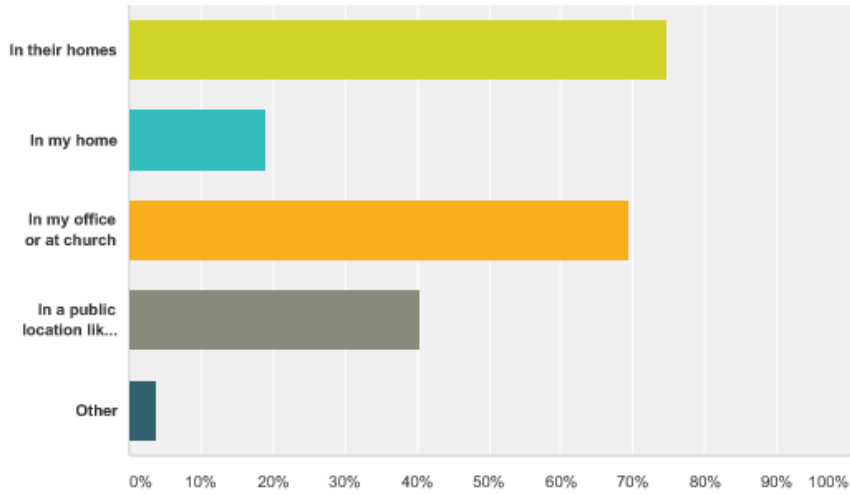
Answer Choices	Responses	
Members are less willing to meet for a home visit.	26.58%	21
Members are more willing to meet for a home visit.	3.80%	3
Members are just as willing to meet for a home visit today as they were at the beginning of my ministry.	56.96%	45
It depended more on the individual congregation's location/culture than anything else.	12.66%	10
Total		79

Q5 How many non-crisis, non-shut in, personal visits do you make per month on average?



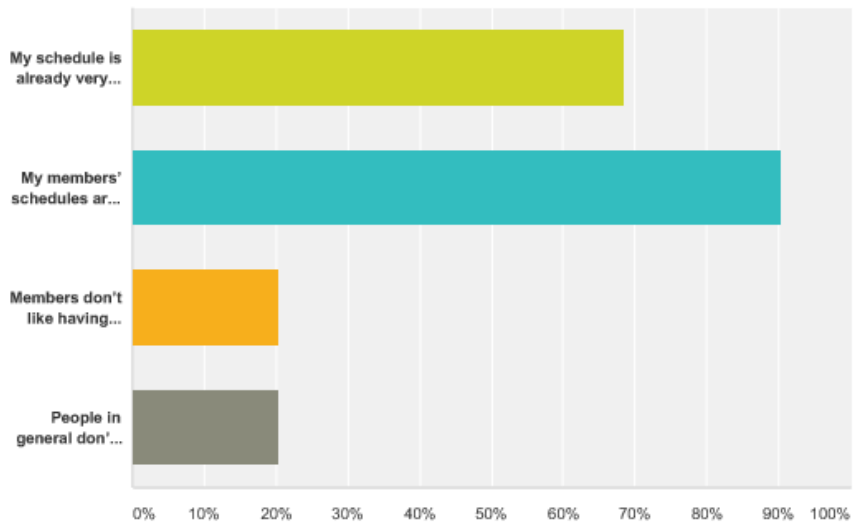
Answer Choices	Responses	
0	5.06%	4
1-2	35.44%	28
3-5	32.91%	26
6-10	13.92%	11
11-20	8.86%	7
20+	3.80%	3
Total		79

Q6 Where do you primarily meet with members? Check all that apply



Answer Choices	Responses
In their homes	74.68% 59
In my home	18.99% 15
In my office or at church	69.62% 55
In a public location like a coffee shop	40.51% 32
Other	3.80% 3
Total Respondents: 79	

Q7 Please describe the obstacles that you face as you do or consider doing member visitation.
Check all that apply.



Answer Choices	Responses
My schedule is already very busy.	68.49% 50
My members' schedules are very busy	90.41% 66
Members don't like having their pastor in the home	20.55% 15
People in general don't like entertaining in their home	20.55% 15
Total Respondents: 73	

Q8 What are the benefits you have observed from regular member visitation?

Q9 Please describe your strategy for conducting non-crisis member visits in this church.(You could include strategies for setting up visits and/or strategies for making the actual visit more meaningful).

Q10 What should I have asked, but didn't, that you believe is important in regard to my thesis topic? If you would like to talk more about this subject, I would love to interview you. Please send me an email and we can set up a time to talk. Thanks so much for your time!

APPENDIX III

Pastor Interview Questions

Please describe the size and demographics of your congregation.

How has member visitation changed during the course of your ministry?

Please describe the obstacles that you face as you do or consider doing member visitation.

What is your strategy for conducting non-crisis member visits in this church?

What advice do you have for specific questions you can ask people to get to know them better and more quickly?

What are the benefits you have observed from regular member visitation?

What should I have asked, but didn't, that you believe is important in regard to my thesis topic?

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