

## Screening in Faith

### MINISTRY GUIDELINES – CONDUCTING IN-HOME VISITS

There is a wide variety of reasons and circumstances that make meeting people in their own homes a necessary part of The Church's ministry. When visiting shut-ins, preparing people for baptism, welcoming newcomers, conducting stewardship or planned giving campaigns, or responding to pastoral crises, it is often necessary and desirable to go to someone's home.

However, visiting people in their own homes presents its own set of challenges. Homes, by their nature, are private environments. Because a person tends to be more comfortable and relaxed in his or her own environment, this increased degree of relaxation may, in fact, make him or her more vulnerable. Also, because the person being visited is better able to control the situation in his or her own environment, he or she may hold a higher degree of power than the visitor. Visitors should be aware that they are potential victims of abuse when visiting someone's home and should take the necessary steps to protect themselves.

The following guidelines are meant to protect both parties in these situations – the visitor and the visited.

1. Always arrange the visit in advance. Establish a starting time and approximate ending time, as well as a clear purpose for the visit so that the individual knows exactly what to expect.
2. Make another person (secretary, spouse, colleague) aware of where you are going and when you can be expected to return.
3. Be respectful of people's time and do not overstay your welcome. When visiting a shut-in or someone who is ill, be particularly conscious of how they are feeling and avoid over-tiring them.
4. Keep the pastoral purpose of your visit in mind at all times. Do not attempt to unduly persuade or influence the person, particularly if he or she seems confused. Never offer advice about medication or medical treatment, and avoid arguing with, or agitating the person you are visiting.
5. Stay in the most public areas of the home – the living room, family room, or kitchen. Avoid entering a person's bedroom unless a 3rd party is present in the home.
6. Choose a seat at a comfortable distance from the person you're talking to, avoid sitting next to them on a couch or sofa. Do not invite, initiate, or tolerate any unwanted or inappropriate physical contact.
7. Visitors should never engage in any form of sexual impropriety with those whom they are visiting. Sexual impropriety includes, but is not limited to, all forms of overt or covert seductive speech, gestures and behaviours as well as explicitly sexual contact.
8. Do not agree to meet anyone in his or her own home if you sense your own personal safety may be compromised, or if you feel that there is the potential that a boundary may be crossed. If a person whom you don't know well asks for a meeting and you are at all suspicious, arrange to meet him or her at church offices, a coffee shop, or a local restaurant until you know him or her better.
9. When first arriving at a person's home, assess the situation for anything that may be out of the ordinary. Do not continue if the person is inappropriately dressed, under the influence of alcohol or drugs, or if a person or animal acts in a threatening or aggressive manner and is not properly restrained.
10. If the person acts strangely, says or does things that make you feel unsafe or uncomfortable, or initiates inappropriate physical contact, tell them to stop, then, reestablish and maintain appropriate

boundaries. If the behaviour continues, excuse yourself, document what happened, and report it to your supervisor. Do not stay in a potentially dangerous or compromising situation.

11. Do not take the person away from the home for a walk or in your car unless specifically arranged in advance as part of the visit and approved, in advance, by your supervisor. If driving a person to appointments or errands is part of the stated ministry, drivers must hold a valid driver's license and insurance. Seat belts must be available for all passengers. Drivers must not have any alcohol or drugs in their system when driving. If possible, driving ministries should be team ministries to avoid being alone in a car with a vulnerable person.
12. Visitors must treat all information and communications obtained while visiting as strictly confidential and should not disclose them to anyone except where required by law or where given written consent by the individual(s) involved. When discussing the details of a particular situation with a supervisor, the identity of the people involved must be protected.
13. Except where the stated purpose of the visit is stewardship or planned giving, it is best not to accept gifts or donations when making in-home visits. Encourage the person to make his or her donation using the offering plate or by mailing it directly to the church. If the person insists on giving you something while you are there, provide a written receipt. Explain that the church will issue an official receipt at the appropriate time.
14. People should be encouraged to speak with their family before making significant contributions in order to avoid allegations of undue influence or abuse of trust.
15. Be aware of signs that a person may not be caring for him or herself as he or she should, and may require additional community resources to assist him or her. Signs of personal neglect include, but are not limited to: a decrease in personal hygiene, wearing the same clothes all the time, particularly if they are stained or soiled, and periods of confusion, disorientation, or loss of memory.
16. If you become concerned about the well being of a person whom you are visiting, speak to your supervisor about trying to initiate contact with a family member in order to discuss the situation and recommend possible courses of action. Keep in mind that a conversation of this nature with a family member may be perceived by the person whom you are visiting, as a betrayal of trust and for a breach of confidentiality. Care and discretion must be exercised in such situations.
17. Persons who make in-home visits to the same person on a regular basis should be aware of their own level of competence and avoid working in areas for which they are unqualified.