

Purpose of Home Visits

According to the National Synod of Dort (1618-19) the threefold purpose of home visits is to encourage the members to live by faith, to comfort them in adversity and to warn them against errors in doctrine and life. We do well to keep this threefold purpose in mind. This threefold purpose is reflected in our Church Order when it describes the task of the elders. They must “faithfully visit the members of the congregation in their homes to comfort, instruct, and admonish them with the Word of God, reproving those who behave improperly” (Art.22). And so the ultimate purpose of home visits is the edification of the church and growth in the ways of the Lord. The congregation, in its individual members, must remain in Christ and live out of him. Only then will we come to the *“mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine”* (Eph 4:13,14).

Home visits are meant for the well-being of the congregation so that every member may live in the joy and strength of the Lord. At a home visit, the elders receive a personal attestation from the members that they are sound in doctrine and of irreproachable conduct.

Our forefathers often spoke of the home visit as a visitation. C. Vonk, in two volumes dealing with home visits, is especially an advocate of this position. He states that the elders’ task is not to see whether those whom they are visiting are children of the kingdom but to see whether the citizens of the kingdom of God are living according to the laws of the realm to investigate whether they really bend under its rule with all their being.

By using the ten commandments as a guideline, the elder finds out whether the preaching really bears fruit within the life of the members of the congregation. These are considered 10 vital points on the home visit’s agenda. The preacher sows the Word and the elders seek fruit. Through the elders the Lord visits his people. If the ten commandments are used as a theme, it must be kept in mind, however, that the ordinances of the Lord come to us in the context of thankfulness and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.

The work of the elders will be greatly enhanced when it is backed by clear, solid instruction from the pulpit which directs the people of God to know why they are a congregation of Christ and how they must live for the Lord and one another. Effective preaching is specific and pointed. The people are fed with the riches of what they have in Christ and shown how this ought to manifest itself in fruits of faith.

As shepherds of the flock, the elders supervise the sheep for their well being. The great Shepherd, Jesus Christ, tends the flock through his office bearers. If the sheep are wandering, then the shepherd must lead them back to the green pastures of the Word of God and the protection of the sheepfold.

We should never allow a home visit to deteriorate into a “gripe and complaint session.” If an individual has questions or concerns, he or she may voice them at the conclusion of the visit but should not derail the elders from the purpose of the visit.

Furthermore, the visitors must make sure the visit does not drift into small talk about a number of matters outside the purpose of the visit. Some small talk at the beginning of the visit may be valuable to set everyone at ease but it should not take up too much time.