

# Who Visits?

In some circles only one elder visits. It is suggested that this gives more room for intimacy. Nevertheless, if we are to maintain the official character of home visits two elders (or an elder and the minister) need to be present. Thus, reports to the consistory can be done according to the rule of Deuteronomy 17 and Matthew 18. This does not take away the individual responsibility of each elder to be familiar with the members of his ward on an individual basis. He should be in contact with the members in his district on other occasions. When elders are familiar with their ward and are willing to do all things in obedience to the Word of God they will be true watchers over souls (Heb 13:17).

When home visits were first introduced by the churches of the Reformation they were conducted by a minister who was accompanied by an elder. In most churches this is no longer practiced. Nevertheless, it is to the benefit of both congregation and minister when a minister accompanies an elder on the official work of home visits.

Ministers can develop a wrong picture of the congregation because they only step into the homes of those individuals who have difficulties. Most ministers would probably like to go on home visits but do not have the time to do so. This is why the elders and deacons should look for ways in which more time can be freed up for the minister. For example, they may be able to do some of the visits the minister is presently involved in (visiting the sick, lonely, and elderly) or they may want to evaluate whether all the things a minister is expected to do really belong to the duties of his office. Furthermore, it may be advisable that during a week of an exchange, the minister is freed from all other duties and spends the week making visits with the elders. You may also want to consider starting the home visits at a time of the year when Bible Study societies and catechism classes have not commenced as yet.

Some of the benefits of having the minister take part in home visits can be listed as follows:

- It is a golden opportunity for the minister to know the congregation better

- It allows him to be proactive rather than reactive in dealing with the needs of the congregation
- He does not read the congregation through the eyes of the elders
- He gets to see the elders in operation as they carry out their task and also learns from them
- It greatly helps the elders who have not been trained in this work.

A minister accompanies his fellow elders on home visits for his own benefit, for the benefit of his elders and for the well-being of the congregation. More importantly it is part of his task description. He is to convince, rebuke and exhort and be unfailing in patience and in teaching. He is to assist the elders in the government and ruling of the church. Following the example of the apostle Paul he is to perform this duty in public and from house to house (Form for the Ordination of Ministers of the Word).