

# Church visiting: Frequently asked questions

## 1: What is church visiting?

Church visiting is a team of two people appointed by the broader church (classis) meeting with a council to learn about the spiritual health of the congregation, to discuss areas of ministry where the church is experiencing the Lord's blessing and where the church is struggling, and to ascertain whether the office bearers are ministering properly and faithfully.

## 2: Why should we do church visiting?

Here are three reasons:

1. Through our Church Order, we have committed ourselves to do this for one another. (See Article 42b)
2. It is a tangible way for Classis Alberta North to live into its mission to "assist, support, and encourage faithful and creative local ministry, promoting healthy churches."
3. Synod 2009 advised our classes "to emphasize the importance of church visiting, thereby acknowledging its value for maintaining spiritual health and vitality in the member congregations of classis."

## 3: How do we do Church Visiting?

Church Visitors will make a request to be received by a council and a date for a visit will be negotiated. The team will have a preparatory meeting with the pastor and two or three council members to manage expectations for the visit, handle details, and agree on subjects that should be discussed in addition to the survey results.

In preparation for the visit, council members will fill out an online and anonymous survey that contains 22 statements. The answers will be tabulated by DataWise Consulting with the results communicated to the church visitor team. The team will develop a visit agenda informed by these results. At some time in the process the council will learn the results of the survey.

The Team will likely meet with the pastor & spouse prior to the visit with council.

The Team is required to submit a written report of its work to classis. The council will receive a copy of the report for its information prior to the report being sent to the Stated Clerk and to the Church Visitation Ministry Coordinator.

## 4: How long does it take to do the online survey?

Our experience has shown that it takes about 10 minutes.

## 5: Does the survey cost anything? If so, who pays for it?

Tabulating and reporting the surveys costs \$50 per council. Classis Alberta North will receive the bill and pay for it through the classis ministry shares that the churches provide.

## 6: Whom do we call when we want or need a church visit?

Consult the chart under “Church Visitor Teams (2023)” on this webpage, look for the name of your church, and then note the names of the two visitors indicated. A second option is to contact the Church Visitation Ministry Coordinator (John Ooms).

### **7: How often should we do church visiting?**

Our Church Order says that each church of classis should be visited annually. Our classis is large and covers a large geographic area. Over the years we have tried to be faithful to this requirement of annual visits, but we have not been successful. Regrettably, the practice of church visiting became rare.

Discontent with this unhealthy development motivated classis over the past several years to explore ways to fulfill our obligation. At its March 2022 meeting, classis made decisions that reformed its expectations and its practices of church visiting, most notably incorporating the use of a survey as an instrument. At its October 2022 meeting, classis appointed eight people to serve as church visitors and allotted them to four teams of two persons each.

Now, each church visitor team is expected to visit two churches per year: one church between January and May, and the second church between September and November. This means that a church will receive a church visit once every 3 years.

### **8: When is it wise for us to call in the church visitors, in distinction from our “official” visit with them?**

Our Church Order recognizes that “churches are free to call on the church visitors whenever serious challenges arise that would benefit from their advice.” (Art. 42b). For instance:

- When allegations of abuse against a church leader are brought forward to council (See Supplement, Article 42-b).
- When relationships between council, congregation, or pastor are becoming strained and difficult.
- When issues regarding the viability of the congregation need to be explored or addressed.
- When diminishing financial resources or shifting membership commitment affect the council’s ability to provide denominational or classical ministry shares.
- When conflicts occur within the congregation that threaten to divide it, or seriously impair its ministry.
- Whenever the council is stumped as to how to proceed.