

From the Pastor's Desk (1989 - 1993)

Church Visitation

The time honoured practice of family visitation dates back to the early church. Already very early in church history we find elders visiting members in their homes. The Bible often refers to personal pastoral care. For example, in Hebrews 13:7 we read, "Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you." The church fathers, Clement of Alexandria and Cyprian spoke about church officers visiting the members in their homes with some regularity. Chrysostom said that in spite of many difficulties this task involved, it was essential for the welfare of the churches. During the Middle Ages this practice disappeared. The emphasis was no longer on personal pastoral care, but on the sacraments, private confessions to priests, penitence and absolution. During the Reformation, Protestants wanted to go back to the Scriptures. They radically broke with the deformations that had crept into the Church. The Reformers broke with the system of the confessional and penance. They once again visited families in their homes.

Why family visitation? In this age in which individualism is rampant, the fellowship character of the church should be stressed. We are mutually responsible for one another. We cannot develop spirituality in isolation. Through visitation we encourage one another in the faith. We should talk about our relationship to the Lord, whether or not we are growing in faith, enjoy personal peace with God. As Reformed believers the Lordship of Christ in every area of life also gets the attention. How do we function as Christians in an increasingly secular world? How can we withstand the onslaught of the evil one? How can we be effective soldiers of the cross? Dr. Peter Y. DeJong wrote in his little volume, *Taking Heed to The Flock*, "The purpose of the work of the elders is to remind the believers in the name of the Commander-in-Chief of their personal and social responsibilities." May family visitation be a good spiritual experience for both elders and families visited.

Johan D. Tangelder