

Ministry Opportunities at St. John the Evangelist Church, Kitchener Parish Visitor

At St. John's, our various ministries support our intention to be a faithful and thriving community.

Connecting individuals and ministries is an act of mutual discernment – you may wonder which ministry is the best fit for you at this time, and the community may recognize gifts in you and encourage you to share them as we seek to be a thriving community.

The community also has some expectations for ministries. Knowing these expectations can help you and the community discern which ministry makes sense for you at this time. Some ministries have a time trial to assist further with this discernment.

How does this ministry contribute to living as a faithful and thriving community and your life of discipleship?

Jesus deliberately chose to be with those people who are vulnerable and in need.

Parish Visitors offer a prayerful, supportive presence to parishioners who are unable to come to church because of a variety of difficulties and help these fellow parishioners stay connected with the life and ministry of St. John's.

What gifts and skills are helpful for this role?

- Knowledge and understanding of pastoral care approaches (or willing to learn).
- Strong interpersonal, communication and listening skills.
- Sensitivity, compassion and respect for people of diverse backgrounds.
- Able to set and maintain personal boundaries.
- Able to assess situations and problem-solve or refer appropriately.
- Able to work as part of a team.

What to expect:

- Training (e.g., role of visitor; boundaries/limits; sharing faith and praying with the person you are visiting; records that need to be kept; when to make a referral or contact the clergy).
- Regular meetings (to share information, support one another, and plan upcoming events).
- Spending time connecting with isolated parishioners via the telephone, in-home visits, or hospital or residential care setting visits.

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Responsibilities

- Abide by the attached guidelines.
- Make scheduled home, hospital, and nursing home visits as assigned.
- Offer presence and prayer.
- Make referrals and communicate concerns to the pastoral staff as appropriate.
- Maintain appropriate and confidential records.
- Attend parish visitors meetings and training.
- Communicate regularly with the Coordinator regarding scheduling, availability, and information about the person you are visiting as appropriate.

- *Initial Contact:* once matched with one or more persons in the parish who have expressed a desire for a regular visit, phone the person, introduce yourself as a visitor from the church and arrange a time for a visit.

- *Initial and subsequent visits:*
 - Call the day before you visit as a reminder.
 - Take the latest Sunday bulletin and newsletter and any other information from the church in which the person may be interested.
 - Ask how often the person would like a visit (it is best to set a date for the next visit before you leave).
 - Listen, share, pray.
 - Maintain confidentiality. If any information is to be shared with someone, e.g., clergy, ask for permission.

Limits of the Position

- This is a ministry of “being with”, listening, sharing, praying and occasionally making referrals.
- It is not a counseling or advice-giving ministry.
- It is not a problem-solving ministry (e.g., settling issues the person has with family or friends).
- It is not an errand-running ministry (e.g., getting groceries or making bank deposits).
- Follow the attached guidelines for:
 - Parish Visiting
 - In-home visits
 - Hospital or nursing home visits
 - Ministering with the elderly

- If the parishioner starts asking for more time than you can give, discuss this with your Coordinator.
- Complete the one-on-one reporting form as needed.

Accountability: To the Rector

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Guidelines for Parish Visiting

Why we visit:

God is the source of all being and the author of all creation which, like a great story, continues to unfold within ourselves and the world. As Christians, our experience is that God desires to be in a close relationship with us; a relationship in which God's care, compassion and love for us can be felt. God desires this so strongly that God came to be with us in our own human form – in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. In his ministry, Jesus deliberately chose to be with those people who are vulnerable and in need.

When we visit with others, God's great story of creation and salvation continues to unfold. In our visit we make manifest God's desire to be in relationship with us. In a pastoral visit we affirm and strengthen our physical, emotional, and spiritual connectedness to each other, our families and friends, our faith community, and God.

There are always persons who through physical or emotional difficulties cannot come to church and feel disconnected from the faith community. As a parish visitor you represent the St. John's community to the person who is isolated from the community.

The importance of active listening:

The primary skill for parish visitors is active listening; active listening means encouraging a person to talk about themselves and their interests or concerns and helping them to feel comfortable doing so. Through careful listening you will come to know this person and get a sense of their relationship with God. It is very important to be non-judgmental regarding the person's life experiences and faith.

Active listening involves asking "open-ended" questions, that is, questions that cannot be answered by "yes" or "no". Examples of open-ended question are:

- How have you been involved in the church in the past?
- What was it like?
- What are some of your hobbies and interests?

Some other approaches to encourage the person to talk about him or herself are:

- Encourage the person to tell stories of his or her life, friends, and family.
- Pay special attention to pictures and interesting objects in the home. Point them out and ask about them. There are usually many important stories behind them.
- Make a mental note of important persons and places in the person's life. Is the parishioner still connected with these important persons and places or does the parishioner feel disconnected (i.e., from family, friends, work, favourite activities, etc.).
- Giving people a chance to share some of these important stories will connect them and their lives with you.
- Share *some* of your own personal experiences that are related to his or her experiences, but don't tell your whole life story!

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Praying with a parishioner:

Some visitors are very comfortable with praying and others are more hesitant. Saying prayers with someone is a very special way of connecting with someone and with God. It is an opportunity to affirm that the person is not alone and thus is a moment grounded in hope.

A simple format is:

1. Think of the things that you and the parishioner would like to give thank for at this time.
2. Think of the things that are of concern for the person at this time.
3. Ask the person if there are people they would like to include in their prayers today. They might include children who live far away, friends who are sick, spouses or other family members who have died.

Other suggestions for praying:

- You can use the responsorial format given below or say prayers that you create on the spot.
- The careful selection of a psalm can be very helpful since so many psalms are in the format of conversing with God.
- Close with the Lord's Prayer. It gathers all your prayers together in one and is a prayer which most people are able to recite easily.

A Form of Prayer

Let us pray to God saying: Lord in your mercy, **Hear our prayer.**

Loving God, we thank you for your many gifts to us, for the love which brings us together, for the earth which provides for our needs, for the new life you have given us in Jesus Christ . . . (*add other thanksgivings*). Lord in your mercy, **Hear our prayer.**

We pray to you for our Christian family (*especially for . . .*) that we may receive grace to grow in your love. Lord in your mercy, **Hear our prayer.**

We pray to you for our world, for all its cares and needs, and for all who lead us and care for us (*especially for . . .*). Lord in your mercy, **Hear our prayer.**

We pray to you for those in need, for the sick and the lonely, for the hurt and frightened, and for those who feel they are without hope (*especially . . .*). Lord in your mercy, **Hear our prayer.**

We pray to you for those we love who have died and for those who grieve, that you will surround them with your care and love (*especially . . .*). Lord in your mercy, **Hear our prayer.**

We pray for one another asking you to bless us, our friends and relatives. Bless our homes and our lives together as people of faith. Lord in your mercy, **Hear our prayer.**

Prayer may conclude with the Lord's Prayer.

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Guidelines for Parish Visitors: 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.

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 of the visit so that the individual knows exactly what to expect.
2. Make another person (parish administrator, 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 third 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.

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8. 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 Coordinator. Do not stay in a potentially dangerous or compromising situation.
9. 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 Coordinator. Drivers must hold a valid driver's license and insurance and may not have any alcohol or drugs in their system while driving. Seat belts must be available for all passengers. If possible, driving ministries should be team ministries to avoid being alone in a car with a vulnerable person.
10. 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 your Coordinator, the identity of the person involved must be protected.
11. It is best not to accept gifts or donation 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 and explain that the church will issue an official receipt at the appropriate time.
12. It is Diocesan policy that all donors should seek independent financial and legal counsel before making any significant contributions to the church. Older adults should also be encouraged to speak with their family before making significant contributions in order to avoid allegations of undue influence or abuse of trust.
13. Be aware of signs that a person may not be caring for himself or herself as he or she should, and may require additional community resources or assistance. 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.
14. If you become concerned about the well-being of a person with whom you are visiting, speak to your Coordinator 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 a breach of confidentiality. Care and discretion must be exercised in such situations.
15. 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.

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Guidelines for Parish Visitors: Hospital or Nursing Home Visits

People in a hospital or nursing home may be in unfamiliar surroundings. They may be experiencing considerable pain, uncertainty, or fear over their condition. They may be affected by anesthesia or another medication. People in these situations may be more vulnerable because they may not be completely themselves. Additional care must be taken when ministering to them, as outlined below:

1. Upon arrival at the hospital or nursing home, check with a nurse or attendant to determine if the person is able to receive visitors and to make them aware of your presence.
2. Make yourself aware of institutional rules and procedures and follow them closely. For example, some institutions may require the use of security badges for regular visitors. Some areas of the institution may have strict hand washing or other policies in place.
3. If you are a regular visitor and the institution has an on-site chaplain, make yourself known to this person. Use this person as a resource when appropriate. The chaplain will be aware of any procedures or issues specific to his or her institution.
4. Be prepared to listen to the situation or diagnosis with the individual you are visiting, but refrain from giving opinions or advice. Never pass judgment on the nature or quality of medical care being provided.
5. Be prepared to meet with friends or family members who may be visiting at the same time as you are. Keep in mind that these people may or may not hold the same religious beliefs as the person you are visiting.
6. Discussions with the person you are visiting, their family, or friends should be held in strict confidence. 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 your Coordinator, the identity of the people involved must be protected.
7. If a nurse or doctor comes to engage the patient in discussion or treatment, excuse yourself to a waiting area until the conversation is finished, unless specially requested to remain by the patient or the health care professional.
8. If the person you are visiting requires assistance to use the washroom, or to get out of bed, seek the help of a nurse or orderly. Never attempt to help the person on your own.

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9. Do not take the person away from the hospital or nursing home for a walk or in your car unless specifically arranged in advance as part of the visit and approved, in advance, both by your Coordinator and the appropriate authorities at the hospital or nursing home. Drivers must hold a valid driver's license and insurance and may not have any alcohol or drugs in their system while driving. Seat belts must be available for all passengers. If possible, driving ministries should be team ministries to avoid being alone in a car with a vulnerable person.
10. People making hospital or nursing home visits should be aware of their own level of competence and avoid working in areas for which they are unqualified.

Additional Guidelines for Ministering with the Elderly

Most of us are familiar with the physiological, cognitive and emotional changes that can accompany aging.

- Pain and stiffness in the joints can result in loss of manual dexterity and decreased mobility.
- Hearing often deteriorates, making communication more difficult.
- Cognitive ability may decrease, resulting in difficulties with memory or periods of confusion and disorientation.
- Significant emotional changes are likely to occur as people begin to face end of life issues including:
 - the inability to perform tasks that they once did
 - loss of significant life-long friends or companions
 - possible regrets over mistakes made or opportunities missed
 - the inevitable facing of one's own mortality

All this being said, we need to remember that many people remain active and contributing members of the community well into their eighties and nineties. Often, these people possess life experiences, gifts, and wisdom that make them a joy to minister to, as well as significant resources for ministering to others.

The following should be kept in mind while working with older adults:

1. Approach each person as an individual with dignity and respect. Do not prejudge an older adult's interests or abilities. Physical difficulties may not be indicative of interest or mental acuteness.
2. Older adults often hold clergy and other church personnel in extremely high regard, particularly if they were taught at an early age not to question the Church. Extra caution must be used not to exert undue influence in these situations, particularly in the area of financial giving.

We acknowledge and are grateful for the guidelines developed by St. George's Anglican Church, London. St. John's guidelines are an adaptation of St. George's guidelines for in-home visits, hospital or nursing home visits, and ministering with the elderly.