

II. THE ASSEMBLIES OF THE CHURCH

C. The Classis (continued)

Article 42: Church Visitors

- a. The classis shall appoint at least one committee composed of two of the more experienced and competent officebearers, two ministers, or one minister and one elder, to visit all its churches once a year.
- b. The church visitors shall ascertain whether the officebearers faithfully perform their duties, adhere to sound doctrine, observe the provisions of the Church Order, and properly promote the edification of the congregation and the extension of God's kingdom. They shall admonish those who have been negligent, and help all with advice and assistance.
- c. The churches are free to call on the church visitors whenever serious problems arise.
- d. The church visitors shall render to classis a written report of their work.

Commentary

I. Appointment of church visitors

- a. The number of church visitor teams
The number of such church-visiting committees is left to the discretion of classis and is likely to be determined by such factors as the number of churches in the classis and the geographical location of the churches.
- b. Qualifications of church visitors
Because church visitors are called upon to give advice and monitor the faithfulness of other officebearers it is important that persons with experience are chosen for this responsibility. The appointment of competent elders should not be overlooked.
- c. Frequency of church visits
While the Church Order specifies that these visits be done annually, a less frequent schedule is maintained by many of the classes. How often the visits happen is less important than that the visits be helpful and meaningful.

2. Duties of church visitors

The following duties are specified for those appointed to be church visitors:

- a. They shall ascertain whether the officebearers
 - 1) faithfully perform their duties,
 - 2) adhere to sound doctrine,
 - 3) observe the provisions of the Church Order,
 - 4) properly promote the edification of the congregation,
 - 5) properly promote the extension of God's kingdom.
- b. They shall fraternally admonish those who have been negligent.
- c. They shall help all with advice and assistance.

The use of such words as "admonish" and "ascertain" may place too much emphasis on the negative aspects of church visiting. Actually, church visiting is of a positive nature and should be regarded and carried out as part of the mutual care of the churches of the classis for each other. When conducted in the spirit of fraternal and mutual help, it becomes a welcome and valuable practice that promotes the unity of the churches.

Church visitors are required to make inquiry not only about officebearers directly serving the local church but also regarding officebearers serving in specialized ministries (e.g., missionaries and chaplains), including all ministers of the Word whose credentials are held by a council and all ministry associates appointed (or ordained) by the local church.

Synod has also instructed the classes (through the church visitors) to review annually the status of all ministers whose credentials are held by churches of the classis and who are not serving as pastors of congregations and to take appropriate action in cases which do not conform with the Church Order or synodical regulations.

3. Guide for Conducting Church Visiting

In order to assist the churches and the church visitors Synod 2000 adopted a "Guide for Conducting Church Visiting." It is included in this manual as Appendix D.

4. Availability of church visitors

Churches are free to call on the church visitors whenever serious problems arise. That does not mean that councils are restricted to calling only the church visitors for advice. There are others who can be consulted when specific need for help arises. In such instances the council is responsible for whatever decision it makes. Church visitors' advice requires a report to classis, which can approve or disapprove the advice given.

5. Reports of church visitors

Church visitors shall render to classis a written report of their work. In some classes these reports are preserved in notebooks that are turned over to new teams of church visitors when they are appointed. This practice contributes a measure of continuity and may be helpful both to the visitors and councils.