

# Ten Ways

## TO BE A CARING ELDER



Elders are called to provide pastoral care and encourage faith formation in their congregation. This responsibility is a joy and a blessing, but it can also feel daunting at times. Here are 10 ways to help you get to know the people in your care, develop your skills as a spiritual leader, and conduct helpful, warm visits with church members.

### 1 HOST A POTLUCK WITH HOUSEHOLDS IN YOUR CARE

Invite the households in your care to come together at your home or at church. This provides an opportunity to introduce yourself and for others to share among themselves. Consider including some icebreaker questions like these:

- \* When and why did you come to *[your church name]*, and why have you stayed?
- \* What was significant about your baptism or profession of faith?
- \* What is one of your dreams for our church?

### 2 GET TO KNOW INDIVIDUALS AND FAMILIES

Keep a record of information about birthdays, anniversaries, births, recent deaths, and other significant events in the lives of people in your care. Use this information to send timely greetings and/or notes of encouragement. This record can also guide your prayers for these persons and families. Getting to know one another builds trust with those in your care, and in turn they will be more likely to contact you when a need arises.

### 3 TEAM UP WITH AN EXPERIENCED ELDER

While your church may provide elder training through a workshop or a retreat, a mentoring relationship with an experienced elder will provide support, encouragement, and feedback to elders who are new to the role.

### 4 MAKE THE MOST OF CHANCE ENCOUNTERS

At the local shopping center, a sports event, before and after a worship service, or at any church gathering, intentionally seek out the people in your care. Take a few moments to chat. Find out how they are doing; offer a word of encouragement. Connections like these take little time but go far to help you form relationships. Ongoing contact is vital to your ministry.

## 5 SCHEDULE A TIME TO VISIT TOGETHER

Intentional visiting is as important to your ministry as chance encounters. Scheduled visits provide a way to connect with an individual or a family and to offer support and encouragement. Depending on the person or the type of visit, their home, your home, a room in the church, a coffee shop, a restaurant, or a park bench can serve as a meeting place.

## 6 COMMUNICATE WHY YOU ARE VISITING

The primary purpose of your visit is to help people strengthen their relationship with God. But for some people in your church, the thought of an “elder visit” may cause feelings of anxiety or fear. Others might find it strange or invasive. Briefly explaining the reason for your visit and setting a specific time limit for the visit (one hour is sufficient in most cases) can help to set people at ease.

## 7 PREPARE FOR THE VISIT

Spend time preparing your heart. Ask God to guide your listening and speaking, and ask for peace and wisdom. Think about the person or persons you are visiting. What do you want to remember about them? Do you need to follow up on anything from a previous conversation or visit? Are there specific questions that will help to guide the visit?

## 8 LISTEN ATTENTIVELY AND ASK GOOD QUESTIONS

Your primary concern is the well-being of those you are visiting, and listening is the best way to show that concern and to affirm those in your care. Invite them to do the talking by asking thoughtful questions. (See *10 Ways to Talk with Someone about Their Faith*). Most people are willing to share what’s on their heart if they sense that someone truly cares. Listen well and assure them of God’s grace, love, forgiveness, and faithfulness.

## 9 RESPECT PEOPLE’S TIME COMMITMENTS

An elder visit should usually be completed within an hour. Keep the conversation focused on the person or family, and avoid digressions or sharing too many stories from your experience. If needed, schedule a follow-up visit for matters that require additional conversation.

## 10 END YOUR VISIT WITH PRAYER AND WORDS OF ENCOURAGEMENT

Prayer is appropriate and always appreciated. Ask what the individual or family would like you to pray for, and include items talked about in your visit. Read a short psalm or another appropriate Scripture passage. And once you have said you will leave, thank your host and depart.

The Faith Formation Ministries team is available to consult and brainstorm with you on these ideas and more. We’d also love to hear your faith formation stories so that we can share them with others. You’ll find our contact information at [crcna.org/FaithFormation](http://crcna.org/FaithFormation).



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