

Dear Deacon

Thank you for helping with Hospital Visitation on behalf of the Deacons at SMBC. We found out that no matter how long we have been visiting in the hospital, there are some helpful things to know when doing it for the church. Our team has put together these hints and suggestions. We would also be glad to accompany you on your visit if it would be helpful to you. We thank Dr. Wade Rowatt and Rev. Jackie Ward, Chaplain at Baptist Health Louisville, for graciously providing suggestions.

Deacon Hospital Visitation Ministry Team Purpose

- By our presence, extend the love of Christ to SMBC members, their immediate family, and to those regular attendees of SMBC when they are in the hospital.
- Determine (ask/listen) for opportunities/needs for follow-up care during a convalescence period. (This is especially important for those who are not connected to a Bible study group.) This information should be shared with the deacon visitation team member
- Share the love of Christ through intentional conversation.

Outline of Visit Process, Hints and Suggestions

- On the week you are assigned, please try to visit everyone who is staying in a local hospital at least once. For those SMBC members or regular attendees having surgery, please offer to sit with the family in the waiting room during surgery. If you need help with any of these, please call your deacon team member.
- Ask the pastor's secretary to add you to the daily email list of hospital patients. She updates it every weekday morning around 9-10 am.
- If you are not sure the best time to visit, then call the patient's room. (Baptist Health switchboard is 897-8100.) Intensive care units may have restricted times for visitation. At Baptist Health the ICU & CCU visitation is 5am-1:30pm and 3:30-11pm.
- When you enter the nursing unit, introduce yourself to the unit secretary or whoever is at the nurse's desk. Ask if it is OK to visit the church member. If not, you may leave a Church calling card with a note. The only reason for the visit is to benefit the patient and their family.
- Sometimes there are special instructions for wearing gloves, masks, etc. posted on the patient's room door. Follow the guidelines as posted or ask the nursing staff for help. Excuse yourself if a nurse or doctor needs to visit the patient.
- Be sure to knock on the door of the room and announce who you are, asking if it is OK to enter. Sometimes patients in the hospital are not decently covered or nurses are changing the bed, etc. Respect the patient's privacy.
- When you enter, introduce yourself to the patient and any others at the bedside. Please explain that you represent the Deacons at SMBC.
- If you do not recognize the person, be sure to confirm their name. Sometimes patients are moved to a different room. Sometimes one can walk into the wrong hospital room by mistake!
- Whether you sit down or remain standing depends on the situation. Do not sit on the bed! Be sure the patient can easily see you. Sitting down at the bedside and holding the patient's hand is a good way to make personal contact and give them your full attention. But sometimes a more formal visit is more appropriate.
- For many patients who are uncomfortable or need rest, a brief visit is best. Avoid hurriedness but do not stay too long. Let the patient's needs determine the length of the visit.
- Let them set the stage for the direction of the visit. It is OK to ask how they are feeling, if they are in any pain, etc. But let the patient volunteer any information about their illness. Do not ask for information they might not be prepared to make public. Honor their need for confidentiality. Nothing they tell you should be repeated unless the patient specifically gives you permission to share it.

- Avoid expressing alarm at their condition.
- Do not bring up topics that might cause distress or worry for the church member. Avoid arguments, problems at church and theological debates.
- Ask how the church might be of help. Is there something you could relay to another church member or church staff that would be helpful?
- Be sensitive to the needs of family members and other caregivers. Offer to stay with the patient while a family member takes a break, etc.
- Ask how church members might pray for patient and family. Do not preach, but be sensitive to their spiritual needs.
- Offer to pray at the bedside with them. Touch the person as you pray. You may hold hands with other visitors or family members.
- Include the specific needs they have voiced in your prayer. Include a reminder that many people — church, family and friends — are remembering this person in prayer and let the patient feel surrounded by this love as well. You may also include a prayer for the hospital staff, physicians, etc. But tailor the prayer for the attention span and needs of the patient.
- Ask if they would like to be visited again. If they expect to remain in the hospital over a weekend, another member of the Deacon Visitation Team might be able to visit them the following Monday or Tuesday.
- Please email the pastor's secretary that afternoon or evening to report your visit and to update information on the patient that would be helpful for church staff who will be visiting. Contact other church members, church staff or church ministry leaders as indicated by the needs you identified in this visit.
- A group text (cell phone) message has been established to include all church ministers who do hospital visitation and all members of Deacon visitation team. Especially when the church office is closed this 'text conversation string' is very useful for church staff to notify deacons of updates on members in need and for deacons to notify church staff of urgent needs or changes.

Thank you for giving of your time and talents to this important ministry. Let us know about your experiences, needs and any problems related to Deacon visitation team. We want to provide resources and networking to make this ministry even more effective.

In the Name of Jesus, the source of all comfort and healing,
The Deacon Visitation Team of St. Matthews Baptist Church

By way of explanation, at SMBC the visitation in the hospital and elsewhere is organized in this way:

- Church ministers visit patients in hospital, nursing home, funeral home, etc. on a rotation. The Pastor's secretary keeps a 'prayer list' of needs, locations, dates, etc.
- A separate ministry exists for long-term nursing home and home-bound members. Sunday school classes and other small groups also provide short-term support for members including home care, help with funerals, etc.
- A Deacon care team does visitation for hospitalized members, those in short-term rehab nursing home care, and funeral home visitation.
- This team assigns a Deacon as the 'coordinator' for each week. That person may do their visitation that week or may recruit another deacon's help to visit. As much as possible, a deacon will continue to visit a patient or minister to the family after discharge to a rehab facility or if visitation at funeral home is needed. The Deacon Team Leader tracks which deacon is seeing which church member. The Team Leader also maintains a list of deacons who are not currently on the active deacon council and who are willing and qualified to do visitation.