

Visiting Teacher's Guidebook

What You Need

- A list of the people you visit teach and their contact information. Birthdays and a list of names and ages of those living in the homes of the sisters you visit are nice, too.
- Your companion's name and contact information
- The name and contact information of the person to whom you report your visiting teaching
- Your scriptures
- A copy of the Visiting Teaching Message from the *Ensign*, or in November and May, a copy of a General Conference address with a message that best applies to your sisters

New Route Questions

Here are some questions that may be helpful for you to ask during your first contact with the sisters you visit that will help you determine needs and how to meet them.

- What time is best for us to visit you? Collect information on school, callings, and work schedules that will help you schedule visits at a time that is least inconvenient to your sister.
- Where would you like us to visit you? Though visiting in a home may be the best way to assess a sister's needs, some sisters may need to be visited somewhere other than their home. Visits can take place after church, at the park, at a visiting teacher's home, or at any other safe and appropriate location.
- Do you want to receive the First Presidency Message from the Ensign when we visit?
- Is it alright for me/us to bring my/our child(ren) when we visit? Be sensitive to the needs and preferences of your sisters. Some sisters may be uncomfortable having young children in their homes, or children can be distracting during a visit. State the ages of children that might accompany you.
- Are there any special circumstances we need to be aware of when we come to visit you?
- Provide the sister with you and your companion's contact information. There may be some time after your first contact and until your first visit, so provide the sister with your contact information before then.

How to Make a Visit

- Discuss with your companion who will schedule appointments and how each can take part in presenting the message. Both companions should be involved whenever possible.
- Schedule an appointment.
- Prepare the message, with the input of your companion. Adapt the message and the teaching methods to the circumstances, background, age, and interests of each sister you teach.
- Pray with your companion before you leave on your visit.
- Present the message. Remember to be sensitive to the time constraints of the people you visit. Open and close with prayer, if acceptable to the person visited. You may want to ask, "May we leave you with a prayer? (if yes, then) Who would you like to pray?"
- Discuss with your companion any concerns and ways you can effectively meet the needs of this sister. Immediate or confidential concerns should be addressed with the Relief Society President as soon as possible.
- Report your contact to your Visiting Teaching Supervisor, Visiting Teaching Leader, or Relief Society President.

What to Report

- When did you visit?
- What type of visit was it? Did you make an in-home visit, telephone visit, or other type of contact?
- Did you and your companion make these contacts together?
- Do you have any non-confidential concerns? (Confidential concerns should be reported directly to the Relief Society President.)

Teaching, No Greater Call

The Teaching Part of Visiting Teaching

When you are assigned to be a visiting teacher, an important part of your responsibility is to “learn of the spiritual and temporal needs of the sister and her family” and to “give spiritual instruction through a monthly message” (*Church Handbook of Instructions, Book 2: Priesthood and Auxiliary Leaders* [1998], 203). You are a teacher of the gospel.

In order to teach the sisters assigned to you, you need to prepare yourself spiritually and learn to apply the principles of gospel teaching discussed in this book. You should also strive continually to improve your teaching (see *Teaching, No Greater Call*, “Making a Plan to Improve Your Teaching,” pages 24–27).

This preparation will help you greatly because you may be called to teach sisters in many different situations. You may teach those who are young, elderly, married, single, divorced, newly converted to the gospel, very active in the Church, less active, well-educated, learning disabled, busy, lonely, welcoming, or resistant. Different sisters require different teaching approaches. Whatever the circumstances of the sisters you teach, you can help them know the Savior better and live His gospel more faithfully.

When Sister Elaine L. Jack was serving as general Relief Society president, she told the following story:

“Priscilla Samson-Davis, a sister in Ghana, has known struggles. There have been many rocks on the path of her life. As a teacher she has watched families nurse children through dysentery and malaria, work hard, barter daily for sacks of rice, onions, tomatoes—any food to keep their loved ones alive. She serves as a visiting teacher, regularly traveling on the bus to see a sister on the other side of town. When asked if this task were a burden, given all she had to manage, she simply replied, ‘It’s not hard. The woman I visit can’t read. When I go, I read the scriptures to her.’

“Her simple answer testified of the faith and assurance she had that she was on the proper path. Though her bus route was halting and likely wound up and down streets, in the Lord’s eyes it was truly straight and narrow, for she was going in the right direction. She was about her Father’s business” (in Conference Report, Apr. 1994, 19; or *Ensign*, May 1994, 16).

Selecting the Message

As you select a message to share, remember the following instruction: “Visiting teachers give spiritual instruction through a monthly message. Messages that are published in the *Ensign* or the International Magazines are to be used as a guide and adapted to the needs of each sister” (*Church Handbook of Instructions, Book 2: Priesthood and Auxiliary Leaders* [1998], 203). Seek the guidance of the Spirit as you carefully review the monthly message with your companion and then consider prayerfully each sister you teach. In addition to the prepared message, you should use the scriptures and the teachings of latter-day prophets as your main resources in planning the message. You may supplement these resources with other Church-produced materials.

Preparing the Message

Prepare each visiting teaching message as carefully as you would prepare a lesson for a Church class. The following suggestions may help you:

- Review the lesson. Counsel with your companion about what each of you will contribute to the presentation.
- Follow the suggestions found in *Teaching, No Greater Call*, “Creating Lessons from Conference Talks and Other Resources,” pages 100–101.
- Adapt the message and the teaching methods to the circumstances, background, age, and interests of each sister you teach.

Delivering the Message

The following suggestions will help you as you teach the sisters you visit:

- Pray and read the scriptures together whenever possible. Use the scriptures at every appropriate opportunity. Bring them for each visit. Use them to answer questions or give counsel.
- Follow the promptings of the Spirit as you teach.
- Be sensitive to the time constraints of the sisters you visit.
- Find ways for the sisters you visit to participate in the lessons. Show keen interest in what they have to say.
- Testify of the truths you teach. Share examples of how to apply those truths in everyday life.

Source: *Teaching, No Greater Call*, D: Teaching in the Home, Home Teaching and Visiting Teaching, 10: The Teaching Part of Visiting Teaching, 147

Becoming a Better Home Teacher or Visiting Teacher

By Kellene Ricks Adams

My mother was ill most of my growing-up years, but when I was about 15, her health deteriorated and she almost never left the house. During this time many ward members dropped by, but no one came more often than her visiting teachers. Each Sunday Colleen Goodwin took notes at every Church meeting. Later she'd visit my mother and tell her about every talk and every lesson while Marian Eubanks massaged Mom's sore and swollen legs and feet.

Now, these sisters didn't do this just once or twice. They did it for years! They both worked and had families of their own. But we knew if we ever needed anything, we could call on Mom's visiting teachers. They went more than the extra mile—they became Mom's friends. And they taught her young daughter about true charity.—Tracy Wright, Prairie Fifth Ward, West Jordan Utah Prairie Stake

Wain was a big, strong ex-football player, an outgoing, caring, and helpful elder. Don was a wonderful complement—an example of quiet spiritual strength.

The first time they visited us as home teachers, we knew they cared. They stated it forthrightly and sincerely. As a less-active member, I had previously been skeptical of anything to do with the Church and frequently questioned the motives of ward members. But I knew these two were here for the right reason. I knew they weren't visiting just to satisfy statistics. I knew they weren't here just to check on us because the bishop had asked them to. I knew they came because they believed in modern-day prophets and they valued their home teaching call as an opportunity to magnify their calling in the priesthood.—Dennis Peacock, Kearns 34th Ward, Kearns Utah South Stake

Home teachers and visiting teachers can change lives. Many members treasure memories of strong shoulders, tender hearts, and caring hands offered through these inspired programs. Yet as powerful an impact as home teachers and visiting teachers can have in the lives of others, the actual process of fulfilling our responsibility to “bear one another's burdens” (Mosiah 18:8) can be challenging.

Sometimes it is difficult for companions to find a time to get together and visit their assigned families. Yet it is important for this service to be accomplished in pairs, after the pattern established by revelation for the priesthood to go two by two (see D&C 20:47, 53; D&C 42:6). It is often a greater challenge to merge those two schedules with the available schedules of persons to be visited. Sometimes the number of families to be visited seems to outweigh the workload that home and visiting teachers are able to carry; sometimes the distance, time, or cost it takes to reach homes is daunting. And sometimes the challenge for home teachers and visiting teachers is to obtain the Spirit in resolving the unique problems they face. These stumbling blocks and others can deter members from actually doing the Lord's work of blessing lives.

Home teachers and visiting teachers may find some value, therefore, in the following suggestions and solutions that others have found helpful. These ideas can inspire flexibility, creativity, and commitment—key ingredients as members strive to “teach ... and watch over the church” and “visit the house of each member, and exhort them to pray vocally and in secret and attend to all family duties” (D&C 20:42, 47). The principles shared here can help home teachers and visiting teachers no matter where they serve throughout the world.

Establishing a Set Appointment

One of the challenges of home teaching and visiting teaching can be scheduling appointments. “Some people work this out by setting up a regular time every month for the visit,” reports Bertram C. Willis, president of the Cherry Hill New Jersey Stake. “The families and individuals know the appointment is the afternoon of the first Sunday or the evening of the second Wednesday.”

Kathleen Berger, a visiting teacher in the Palm Bay First Ward, Cocoa Florida Stake, agrees. “We have several sisters we visit, and they all know we always come on the first Tuesday morning of every month,” she says. “We all live far apart and sometimes feel cut off, so these visits are important, and the sisters enjoy them. These Tuesday morning visits are something they can count on.”

Home teachers and visiting teachers say it is important to express to those you visit a sincere desire to be a help and resource in their lives. This desire might in part be accomplished by setting a standing appointment or by asking for two or three possibilities of convenient times (noting the days that are not available) both for you and for those you visit. As possibilities are discussed, express love and concern for the family. Flexibility and compromise might be necessary, but the security of having an established appointment removes a surprising amount of pressure regarding home teaching and visiting teaching.

Flexibility to Meet Special Needs

In many areas, there are more individuals and families to visit than there are active members who can reasonably handle that responsibility. In the Fort Payne Branch, Chattanooga Tennessee Stake, there are only three active priesthood holders, including branch president Roman Lilly. Yet the three men are responsible for home teaching 48 families—and they usually visit at least 45 of them.

“We spend two Saturdays a month home teaching, and we each go with our wives—they do the visiting teaching at the same time,” President Lilly explains. This practice of couples visiting members where a special need exists in a family and when implemented with a bishop’s or branch president’s approval can be reported as both a home teaching visit and a visiting teaching visit (see *Melchizedek Priesthood Leadership Handbook* [1990], 5).

“We leave in the morning and usually return by afternoon. Sometimes we’ll set an evening aside to visit the families we aren’t able to see on Saturdays, and on rare occasions we’ll visit with someone after or before church. Our ward boundaries cover about 115 kilometers, but we understand the opportunity and responsibility of home teaching.”

As is demonstrated in the Fort Payne Branch, the need for husbands and wives to visit together as both home teachers and visiting teachers is unusual. Priesthood leaders in some areas have taken a different approach.

For example, the Carey Idaho Stake does not have enough active members to visit everyone. In trying to resolve the problem, priesthood leaders have had their greatest success in seeking the Spirit for guidance on who most needs to be visited. Michael Chandler, first counselor in the stake presidency, explains: “Each year we ask ward leaders to reevaluate the assignments, praying for inspiration about which families need assigned home teachers. Over the course of time, all members get visited.”

Similarly, home teachers and visiting teachers report that when it is not possible to visit all their families, the Spirit helps direct them to the families most in need of visits. In visiting teaching only, telephone calls and notes can substitute for personal visits on occasions when it is not possible for visiting teachers to meet with those they are assigned to visit.

In areas with a high ratio of less-active members to active members and where approval has been given by priesthood leaders, full-time missionaries sometimes act as companions for Melchizedek Priesthood brethren assigned to visit less-active members.

Presenting the Message

For some home teachers and visiting teachers, presenting a formal message in what sometimes is an informal situation can be an awkward experience. Even when all involved are fully active in the Church, moving the conversation from casual talk to the sharing of a spiritual message can be challenging. It can also be a challenge to present a message that appeals to adults, teenagers, and children alike. When home teachers or visiting teachers are visiting individuals who are reluctant to talk about the gospel or who have even requested no gospel discussions, the awkwardness can increase dramatically.

But there are several non-threatening ways to present a spiritual message. If individuals are uncomfortable talking about the gospel, Larry W. Watkins, president of the Cape Girardeau Missouri Stake, suggests leaving pamphlets or copies of articles for them to read on their own. Another possibility is to invite these members to a specific party, fireside, activity, program, or meeting and discuss what the theme or subject will be and why it is important for them to attend.

“Listening to the Spirit becomes essential as you go home teaching or visiting teaching,” says Jack Cook, a high councilor in the College Station Texas Stake. “We have a high priests group leader and his companion who were visiting a single mother and her daughter. The family was active but talked of feeling spiritually ‘empty.’ There was just not a lot of spiritual movement.

“While visiting one day, this man felt prompted to suggest that this sister might consider attending the temple. Her eyes lit up. She’d never considered the possibility.

“With attending the temple in mind, she set goals, made progress, and grew tremendously,” Brother Cook says. “The day she attended the temple she was ecstatic. Her home teacher had listened to the Spirit and made a difference in her life.”

Receiving the Message

Patience on the part of families and individuals being visited can also bring the Spirit into a home. “I have always done my visiting teaching, and I have always let my visiting teachers come visit me,” shares Lynda Stout, a member of the Lehi Third Ward, Lehi Utah West Stake. “But it wasn’t until Alene Hardee and Wanda Johnson became my visiting teachers that I learned why the Lord has inspired this program to watch over, bless, and teach his daughters.

“Sure, Sister Hardee and Sister Johnson brought treats for my children on the holidays and remembered my birthday. But the thing that impressed me the most was the way they read the Visiting Teaching Message to me every month. These sweet sisters were in their 70s, and sometimes it was hard for them to see the words, or sometimes they stumbled when they tried to pronounce a word. But I could tell by the diligent way in which they read each message that they took their responsibility in delivering the message as a very important assignment from the Lord.”

While some members may have been bothered to have had the monthly message simply read aloud, Sister Stout recognized the importance of accepting the gospel message in whatever form it came. Her humble acceptance of that message allowed her to feel the Spirit and the love of her visiting teachers.

Geographical Distance

While some Church units in areas heavily populated with Latter-day Saints cover only a few square kilometers, many Church units measure their area in hundreds of square kilometers. The North Slope Branch in the Fairbanks Alaska Stake covers more than 20,000 square kilometers. In addition, a night sky blankets the area 24 hours a day for several months of the year, and temperatures can dip to 46 degrees below zero (Celsius). “During the winter months we have problems with polar bears as well,” wryly observes Gaylin Fuller, who served as branch president for about five years.

“We may have the largest branch geographically in the Church,” he continues. “We have members near the Canadian border and others living near the Russian border. The only way to get to some of those areas is with a commercial airplane ticket.

“Needless to say, we do our visiting over the phone to those areas,” he says. “But we make sure we call our families monthly. If there are youth in the family, the Young Men and Young Women presidents call as well. Sometimes these families get several calls a month. We also send them conference materials and updates on Church policy and information.”

But whether the visits are made in person or by phone, members are contacted. “It’s extremely important; we all know that,” says President Fuller of the 10 companionships who shoulder the home teaching assignments in his branch.

Although not as large as the North Slope Branch, the Duluth Minnesota Stake also covers a substantial area. “Our area is going through an economically depressed time right now, and many of our members are living on tight budgets,” explains Gabriele Pihlaja, stake Relief Society president. “Gas money is tight, and visiting teaching can make huge dents in family financial resources.

“Our sisters know that a monthly visit is best,” she continues, “but the bottom line is whatever you do, please don’t do nothing. If circumstances make it impossible to visit everyone once a month, we encourage the sisters to visit at least one or two of the people on their list. The other sisters need at least a phone call or a letter. And then the next month the companionship visits one or two different sisters. That way at least everyone gets a quarterly visit.”

Several older sisters who can no longer drive are also involved in home visiting—through the mail. “We ask these sisters to write monthly to various members, including some of the less-active sisters,” Sister Pihlaja says. “The letters include information about Relief Society Homemaking meeting and upcoming ward activities, and the sisters always invite the recipient to attend these events. One sister just received a thank-you from a woman she had been writing to for years. It made the effort worth every minute.”

Training Teenagers

Home teaching carries with it unique challenges when Melchizedek Priesthood brothers are given as companions Aaronic Priesthood brothers who are busy with school activities, jobs, and friends. Sometimes they haven’t yet experienced enough of home teaching to understand the impact or importance of the assignment. It is crucial to train them properly and involve them as equals.

“One day my companion, Jared Barrott, is going to be the one in charge,” observes Rick Youngblood, a member of the Hixson Ward, Chattanooga Tennessee Stake. “He was just ordained a teacher, but he already understands that as a home teacher, his calling is to look out for the members of our ward.”

Brother Youngblood and Jared take turns presenting the monthly message. In addition, the two have compiled a list of all the birthdays and anniversaries celebrated by the six families they home teach. “We get together every

month and write a note for special occasions,” Brother Youngblood says. “Then Jared mails them. And I always ask him for ideas on how we can better meet the needs of our families and help the families feel the Spirit.”

President Watkins encourages the bishops in his stake to discuss the importance of home teaching with the Aaronic Priesthood brethren as well as their parents. “Parents can offer guidance and encourage the young man to fulfill his calling,” he explains.

He also counsels Melchizedek Priesthood brothers to get to know their companions. “It doesn’t take a lot of time to show interest,” he says. “And when you find out about your companion’s life and activities, you find out what his schedule is like. You are both more likely to try to find a time that works for both of you.”

Taking the Aaronic Priesthood brother out for ice cream after a visit is one suggestion offered by Myron Arthur Peterson, president of the Cardston Alberta Stake. “And always pray with your companion before you leave to go home teaching. It invites the Spirit and helps you both have a positive experience.”

Watching the Children

Visiting teaching also has its unique aspects. “Sometimes visiting teachers don’t like to take their young children with them on a visit, yet finding baby-sitters can be expensive and frustrating,” says Karrie Hoopes, Relief Society president in the Duchesne Second Ward, Duchesne Utah Stake. “In our ward, we have some sisters who baby-sit children while the mothers go visiting teaching. It’s their monthly visiting teaching responsibility.

“We also have an evening district in which both the visiting teachers and the individual being taught have requested evening appointments. This district accommodates visiting teachers whose husbands watch their children after work, and it also accommodates the working sisters who cannot teach or be taught during the day.”

Flexibility is a must, adds Sister Hoopes. “We have one sister who requested visits at 7:00 A.M.; that’s simply the time that worked best for her. Two sisters agreed to that assignment. We have other sisters who do their visiting on lunch hours during work or at other times to meet the needs of various sisters.”

Christine Willis, former Relief Society president in the Moorestown Ward, Cherry Hill New Jersey Stake, reports that many sisters in her ward take turns baby-sitting. “They say, ‘You tend my children while I go visiting, and then I’ll tend yours.’ That way everyone benefits, and the visiting teaching gets done,” she explains.

Regular Interviews Help Significantly

Overwhelmingly, local leaders agree that successful home teaching and visiting teaching require leaders, home teachers, and visiting teachers alike to understand that the calling is from the Lord.

As early as New Testament times, prophets were exhorting members to diligently help and serve one another. “Feed the flock of God which is among you,” taught Peter in 1 Peter 5:2–4 [1 Pet. 5:2–4], “taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind.

“Neither as being lords over God’s heritage, but being ensamples to the flock.

“And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away.”

In early Church history, priesthood brethren were told to “visit the house of each member, exhorting them to pray vocally and in secret and attend to all family duties” and “to watch over the church always, and be with and strengthen them” (D&C 20:51, 53).

One of the best ways to help home teachers and visiting teachers understand the sacredness of their calling is through regular interviews (see *Melchizedek Priesthood Leadership Handbook* [1990], 9–10; *Relief Society Handbook* [1988], 4, 15). “There must be a method of accountability, preferably through leader interviews, that demonstrates to the teachers that what they are doing is important,” says R. Spence Ellsworth, president of the Carey Idaho Stake. “They need to know that the information they are providing about their families is getting back to the people and is being used to bless lives.”

While serving as elders quorum president, Dan MacClain of the Manchester Ward, Concord New Hampshire Stake, and his counselors interviewed an average of 30 home teachers a month. “The interviews didn’t last long,” he says. “We’d schedule time before or after church and sometimes during the week.

“First, we asked the priesthood holder how he was doing, how he felt about home teaching. We tried to use this time to show appreciation, motivate him, and help him understand the importance of his calling as a home teacher. And we tried to resolve any concerns he had related to home teaching, companion challenges, scheduling conflicts, things like that.

“Then we’d review together every family on his list to evaluate the needs of the family. The key was that the communication didn’t stop there. If we found that a family was having difficulty with a daughter who was struggling in school, through the proper channels we’d involve the Young Women president. If a family was experiencing financial difficulties and needed some assistance, the bishop and Relief Society president were informed. We took the information we got in our home teaching interviews somewhere where it became effective.

“As home teachers see the program begin to work, they realize they really do make a difference,” Brother MacClain concludes.

For the past several years, every month home teachers in the Chattanooga Tennessee Stake have visited about 90 percent of the members assigned to them. “The key is accountability through home teaching interviews and phone calls to some home teachers,” says James L. Barrott, first counselor in the stake presidency.

“However, while we’re pleased with this success, we’re not satisfied,” notes stake president Dallas Rhyne, “because we believe that quantity precedes quality. It is tough to have quality home teaching if visits are not being made. Once priesthood holders are in the home, then quality begins.”

Time, distance, personalities, attitudes—the list of challenges goes on. “These are all real issues,” acknowledges Sister Willis. “However, it may be that many answers are really found in helping our home teachers and visiting teachers accept and live the covenants they’ve made at baptism and in the temple.

“When we reach that point, we are fulfilling these callings because we’ve covenanted to do so and not because of numbers and reports. We need to report and share with others our experiences and what we’ve learned. But ultimately, the reason we do home teaching and visiting teaching is because we love the Lord and his children.”

Instruments of the Lord

Through the years, Presidents of the Church and general presidents of the Relief Society have emphasized the purpose and importance of home teachers and visiting teachers.



President Gordon B. Hinckley
President of the Church, 1995–present

“ ‘The teacher’s duty is to watch over the church always, and be with and strengthen them’ (D&C 20:53). This is the mandate of the Lord. I hope that home teachers and visiting teachers will experience two things: first, the challenge of the responsibility that is in their great calling, and second, the sweetness of results from their work, particularly with those among us who are less active. I hope that these teachers will get on their knees and pray for direction, and then go to work to bring these wandering prodigals back into the fold of the Church. If home and visiting teachers respond to this challenge, I honestly believe that they will taste the sweet and wonderful feeling which comes of being an instrument in the hands of the Lord in leading someone back into activity in His Church and kingdom.

“I am making a plea for us to reach out to our brethren and sisters who have known the beauty and the wonder of this restored gospel for a brief season and then for some reason have left it.

“May all home teachers recognize that they have an inescapable responsibility to go into the homes of the people and teach them to live the gospel principles more faithfully, to see that there is no iniquity or backbiting or evil speaking, to build faith, to see that the families are getting along temporally. That is a very serious responsibility; it really is. But it is not a heavy burden—it just takes a little more faith. It is worthy of our very best effort” (*Ensign*, March 1997, 27).



President Ezra Taft Benson
President of the Church, 1985–1994

“Home teaching and visiting teaching are inspired programs. They are designed to reach each member of the Church each month, both the active and the less active. Please give home teaching and visiting teaching an increased emphasis” (*Ensign*, September 1987, 4).

“I feel impressed to speak to you about a priesthood program that has been inspired from its inception—a program that touches hearts, that changes lives, and that saves souls; a program that has the stamp of approval of our Father in Heaven; a program so vital that, if faithfully followed, it will help to spiritually renew the Church and exalt its individual members and families.

“I am speaking about priesthood home teaching. ...

“... It is the priesthood way of watching over the Saints and accomplishing the mission of the Church. Home teaching is not just an assignment. It is a sacred calling” (*Ensign*, May 1987, 48).

“Remember, both quality and quantity home teaching are essential in being an effective home teacher. You should have quality visits, but you should also make contact with each of your families each month. As shepherds to all of your families, both active and less active, you should not be content with only reaching the ninety and nine. Your goal should be 100 percent home teaching every month” (*Ensign*, May 1987, 51).



Elaine L. Jack
Relief Society general president, 1990–1997

“Through visiting teaching we act as mothers, sisters, helpers, companions and friends, one to the other” (*Church News*, 4 September 1993, 6).

“In visiting teaching we reach out to each other. Hands often speak as voices can’t. A warm embrace conveys volumes. A laugh together unites us. A moment of sharing refreshes our souls. We cannot always lift the burden of one who is troubled, but we can lift her so she can bear it well” (*Church News*, 7 March 1992, 5).

“We should never underestimate the value of a one-on-one visit. Just as women walked around Nauvoo gathering information about the conditions of individuals and families in that early era of the Church, so do sisters in Perth, Australia, and Papeete, Tahiti, walk to homes of their neighbors to visit and care for one another. I think it’s exciting to be a part of a worldwide association of sisters who exercise this watchful care over each other. Sometimes when I’ve gone out visiting teaching I’ve thought about that, and wondered if maybe women in Manitoba, Canada, or in Mexico or in France or even in [Russia] were out doing their visiting teaching at the same time I was. It’s quite a concept, to be part of something that is so much bigger than ourselves” (*Eye to Eye, Heart to Heart* [1992], 142–43).



Barbara W. Winder
Relief Society general president, 1984–1990

“Visiting teaching gives us an opportunity to learn how to follow the Savior. As we extend love and unselfish service, we become instruments of the Lord, helping in times of physical, emotional, and spiritual need to touch hearts and change lives. Visiting teaching is the very essence of the gospel and gives us the opportunity to practice the principles found in Mosiah 18:8–9: ‘willing to bear one another’s burdens, ... willing to mourn with those that mourn; yea, and comfort those that stand in need of comfort, and to stand as witnesses of God at all times ... , that [we] may have eternal life’ ”

(*Ensign*, March 1997, 33).



Barbara B. Smith
Relief Society general president, 1974–1984

“We must seek out those among us with need and, using our God-given talents for charity and our means for relieving others, coordinate the two. This has been the charge from the beginning. It is the charge today. We should go personally into each other’s homes, and we should tune our souls to the point that we may find those in need and offer friendship, help as needed, and courage to meet each day’s challenges” (*Ensign*, March 1997, 37).



President Spencer W. Kimball
President of the Church, 1973–1985

“Whenever I think of visiting teachers, I think of [home] teachers also, and think that certainly your duties in many ways must be much like those of the [home] teachers, which briefly are ‘to watch over the church always’—not twenty minutes a month but always—‘and be with and strengthen them’—not a knock at the door, but to be with them, and lift them, and strengthen them, and empower them, and fortify them—‘and see that there is no iniquity ... , neither hardness ... , backbiting, nor evil speaking.’ ([D&C 20:53–54](#).) ...

“To be successful, it seems to me that a visiting teacher would wish to have high purpose and remember it all the time, would want to have great vision, a terrific enthusiasm that cannot be worn down, a positive attitude, of course, and a great love” (*Ensign*, June 1978, 24–25).

“Blessed will be the day when all home teachers, those working on the missionary, genealogical, and the welfare and all programs, become home teachers in every sense of the word, looking after every facet of the lives of their families—spiritual, temporal, financial, moral, marital. That will be the happy day!” (*The Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball*, edited by Edward L. Kimball [1982], 524).

Source: Kellene Ricks Adams, “Becoming a Better Home Teacher or Visiting Teacher,” *Liahona*, Sept. 1998,

A Vision of Visiting Teaching

By President Spencer W. Kimball

My beloved sisters, I think my first awareness or consciousness of the existence and the importance of the Relief Society came very early in my life.

My family left Salt Lake City for Arizona when I was three years old. My mother then had six children, and during the time that she went through five more pregnancies and five more births, she was president of the ward Relief Society.

We went to a new land, where water was drawn out of open wells; where flies were so thick you could hardly see out of the screen door in the evening; where typhoid fever was prevalent, and many other diseases, too; where medical help was extremely limited—there were no hospitals, no nurses, and no trained people except the country doctor who had more than he could ever do.

I read in my mother's journal not long ago such expressions as these: "I left the children with Ruth or Delbert or with Gordon and went to Sister Smith's home where the second twin had just died and where there were other children desperately ill with typhoid fever." Again: "Today I spent the day with other sisters making burial clothes for the two children of Sister Jones." and on and on and on. That was my introduction to Relief Society, and I am sure that to some degree that kind of work is still going forward, for as I understand your work, it includes not only the spiritual and the moral, but also the physical well-being of the people of the ward.

Whenever I think of visiting teachers, I think your duties in many ways must be like those of the home teachers, which briefly are "to watch over the church always"—not twenty minutes a month but always—"and be with and strengthen them"—not a knock at the door, but to be with them, and lift them and strengthen them, and empower them, and fortify them—"and see that there is no iniquity ... neither hardness ... backbiting, nor evil speaking." (D&C 20:53–54.)

What an opportunity! But so many would like to talk about other things—the weather, politics, or to talk about something that was just done in the ward, the division of a ward, the reorganization of a bishopric, the reorganization of the Relief Society presidency, or any of the numerous things that could be done in the ward that people might find reason for questioning or criticizing. How glorious is the privilege of two sisters going into a home, de-emphasizing anything that could be detrimental, and instead, building up all the authorities of the Church, the Church itself, its doctrines, its policies, its practices.

There can be no force used in this program as I understand it. It is a work of encouragement and love. It is amazing how many people we can convert with love and inspire with love. We are "to warn, expound, exhort, and teach, and invite ... to come unto Christ." (D&C 20:59.) This could be nonmembers as well as members.

To be successful, a visiting teacher should have a high purpose and remember it all the time, should have great awareness, a terrific enthusiasm that cannot be overcome, a positive attitude, and a great love.

In the Doctrine and Covenants, the Lord said, "And the Spirit shall be given unto you by the prayer of faith; and if ye receive not the Spirit ye shall not teach." (D&C 42:14.) Assuming that your work is closely allied to that of the priesthood, you shall "teach the principles of the gospel which are in the Bible and the Book of Mormon, in the which is the fulness of the gospel" (D&C 42:12)—not mere ethics—and you always have the liberty to turn to them, and to interpret them, and bring them to the point where your inspiration leads you to give it to that particular sister—a different message to every person, a different approach, a different conclusion, a different approach to testimony.

The teacher, of course, must be living all that she teaches. That goes without saying, though we sometimes forget it: everything she teaches, she lives.

The Lord said, “And I give unto you a commandment that you shall teach one another the doctrine of the kingdom.” (D&C 88:77.)

Don’t let us be satisfied with just visits, with making friends. Friendship, of course, is important, but how better can you make a friend than to teach somebody everlasting principles of life and salvation?

Your testimony is a terrific medium. Nobody can answer nor destroy your testimony. Many scripturalists spend all of their lives in studying the Bible, and they can know and debate the scriptures and turn to them better than many of us; but none of them can ever answer your testimony. It leaves them dumb—without rebuttal. You don’t always have to bear it in the most formal manner, there are so many approaches.

Visiting teachers must excel and give leadership to the women into whose homes they go. They must excel in energy, and awareness and thoroughness—and in testimony, for above all things, their testimony is unanswerable.

The thirty-eighth section of the Doctrine and Covenants, starting with the twenty-third verse, appeals to me:

“But, verily I say unto you, teach one another according to the office wherewith I have appointed you;

“And let every man (and I think we say women too) esteem his (her) brother (sister) as himself (herself), and practice virtue and holiness before me.

“For what man among you having twelve sons, and is no respecter of them, and they serve him obediently, and he saith unto the one: Be thou clothed in robes and sit thou here; and to the other: Be thou clothed in rags and sit thou here—and looketh upon his sons and saith I am just?

“Behold, this I have given unto you as a parable and it is even as I am, I say unto you, be one; and if ye are not one ye are not mine.” (D&C 38:23–24, 26–27.)

There are many sisters who are living in rags—spiritual rags. They are entitled to gorgeous robes, spiritual robes, as in the parable. We talk so much about duty, but it is your privilege to go into homes and exchange robes for rags.

We talk about duty—but we have already lost the enthusiasm, the discernment, and the objective when we say, “I must go this morning and do my visiting teacher.” Rather it could be: “Today is the day I have been waiting for. I am happy to go into the homes of my sisters and help lift them to new heights.”

You have a responsibility. You have been called of God, through the properly constituted authorities. It says in the eighty-eighth section, “Purify your hearts, and cleanse your hands and your feet before me, that I may make you clean;

“That I may testify ... you are clean from the blood (and sins) of this wicked generation.” (D&C 88:74–75.)

You cannot miss a home with impunity; you must not pass a sister by, even if she is a little uncomplimentary, or not too happy for your visit.

For a home teacher or a visiting teacher to accept a responsibility of four, five, six, or seven homes, and leave them in their spiritual rags and tatters is without excuse; and when you go into the homes, there should be no

vain babblings or impressive words. You are going to save souls, and who can tell but that many of the fine active people in the Church today are active because you were in their homes and gave them a new outlook, a new understanding. You pulled back the curtain. You extended their horizons. You gave them something new. Maybe they will never tell you about it in all their lives, but you did the work just the same.

You see, you are not only saving these sisters, but perhaps also their husbands and their homes. If a sister is a little inactive or a little careless, quite likely she has a husband who is a little more so, and she has children that are only dabbling at the program, perhaps. There are exceptions, of course, but they are just hitting at it a little bit here and there. They are not absorbed in the kingdom, so you have a great work to do.

“He which soweth sparingly,” said Paul, “shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully.” (2 Cor. 9:6.) We don’t get anywhere by just saying words. We have to put our heart in the words, and we have to plan and prepare our minds. I wonder if there are any sisters that ever fast, maybe the morning they are going visiting teaching. I don’t know that it is required. There are a lot of things in the Church that are not required, a lot of things we would like to do. The one who goes just to visit homes, to knock on doors, to pass the time of day, and then goes back to make the report is a little bit like the one whom Paul speaks of who is “fighting as one that beateth the air,” (1 Cor. 9:26) and not making any progress. We need to go forth and do our job as we should do it.

I suspect that in almost every district there are women who will not let you in. There are women who do not want you to come in, but they let you. There are women who wish you would go before you do.

When you have a woman who won’t open her door, and you know she is in the house; one who opens her door and does not want to; one who admits you and wishes you did not come; it would be well to follow the advice of the Lord, “Howbeit this kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting.” (Matt. 17:21.)

You know the Lord has intangible methods and means and ways and forces that can affect people. Remember Alma? Alma, persecuting the Church one day, and the next day he was a great advocate of it. (See Mosiah 27.) Remember Paul? One day he was persecuting the Saints or imprisoning them and in a few days here he was preaching the gospel in the synagogue with great power. (See Acts 9.) What was the difference? It was some intangible force that had been brought to bear by the Lord in his wisdom. He touched their hearts. He did something else, too; we know what it was, of course.

Now you say, “Well, that woman can never be affected”. Of course she can be influenced. She can be brought in. President John Taylor said there is none who cannot be converted if the right person makes the right approach at the right time in the right way with the right spirit. He didn’t put all those rights in there, I have added them, but don’t you think that it is impossible.

Go back to your first book of the Book of Mormon and read it again. You remember when Nephi said:

“I will go and do the things which the Lord hath commanded, for I know that the Lord giveth no commandments unto the children of men, save he shall prepare a way for them that they may accomplish the things which he commanded them.” (1 Ne. 3:7.)

It can be done! We must eliminate entirely from our vocabulary the word can’t.

If the Lord called you, do you accept that, or do you think that your ward Relief Society president called you? Now if only your ward president called, then it may be that it can’t be done, but if God called you through proper channels in the way you know you are called—if God called you, then it follows that you cannot fail if you do your full part.

It is easy to get discouraged. It is easy to quit, but you mustn't fail. You remember how Nephi went into an impossible situation and couldn't get the plates. His brothers couldn't. They couldn't buy them. They couldn't bribe them out of the hands of Laban. They couldn't force their way in, and their lives were hanging on a thread. In spite of all that, here comes one boy, unarmed, who walks into a city through a wall that was closed to him, through gates that couldn't be opened, into a garden that was impenetrable, into a vault that was locked, among soldiers that couldn't be bypassed, and comes out with his arms full of records to keep his posterity and others from perishing in unbelief. (See 1 Ne. 3–4.)

He did the impossible. But nothing is impossible to the Lord. Anytime we have him on our side, when he has called us, given us a commandment, then, if our energy and our efforts and our planning and our prayers are great enough for the job, the job, of course, will be completed.

We must always keep in mind a deep sincerity, a great humility, and a total dependence upon the Lord.

Remember that love is the greatest law. When the Lord was asked which were the two greatest laws, he said, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.

"This is the first and great commandment.

"And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." (Matt. 22:37–39.)

He told us who our neighbors were. They were the ones that were away; that were on their journeys; that were injured; the ones that could not pay. Everybody is our neighbor, and the sisters you visit in their homes are your neighbors. If you go to fill assignments, that is one thing, but if you go to bring your neighbor to a full knowledge of the gospel, then that is another thing. It is as I said before—anything can be done.

Author Lloyd C. Douglas (1877–1951) wrote: "Nature was always in revolt against things that thwarted her blind but orderly processes. For many years a tree might wage a slow and silent warfare against an encumbering wall, without making any visible progress. One day the wall would topple; not because the tree had suddenly laid hold upon some supernormal energy, but because patient work of self-defense and self-release had reached fulfillment. The long-imprisoned tree had freed itself, Nature had had her way." (Lloyd C. Douglas, *The Robe*, Boston, 1947.)

You can do that. Like the little vine, the little root, that can topple a wall or split a rock, you can influence people and break them away from their moorings that are not good and bring them to total activity. It can be done!

God bless you sisters in your glorious work, in your sweet personalities, in the extended influence you can pass to others, I pray in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

Source: Spencer W. Kimball, "A Vision of Visiting Teaching," *Tambuli*, Dec. 1978, 2

Teachings of the Presidents of the Church:

David O. McKay

Effective teachers prepare through study, faith, and prayer.

The great obligation upon a teacher is to be prepared to teach. A teacher cannot teach others that which he himself does not know. He cannot make his students feel what he does not feel himself. He cannot attempt to lead a young man or young woman to obtain a testimony of the gospel of God if the teacher does not have that testimony himself or herself.

There are three things which must guide all teachers: first, get into the subject; second, get that subject into you; third, try to lead your pupils to get the subject into them—not pouring it into them, but leading them to see what you see, to know what you know, to feel what you feel.

Every teacher must be prepared on his or her lesson when he or she meets those boys and girls of the class; for, mind you, your presentation of that lesson, your attitude toward the truth in that lesson will largely determine the boys' and girls' attitude toward it and their attitude toward Church activity in general. If you turn them away after class with the feeling in their youthful hearts that they have received nothing by coming, you will find difficulty in getting them to come back the following week. But on the other hand, if you have thrilled them, or if unable to do that, if you have given them one thought which has appealed to them, you will find that their intention and desire to return will be manifest by their presence one week later. ...

Simply reading the lesson manual before time is not enough. In so doing I have not yet made that lesson mine, and until it is mine, until I feel that I have a message to give to my class members, I am not prepared as the Lord has asked me to prepare when he calls upon me to give his word. It must be mine; what I want to give to the boys and girls is what will count when I meet them. I can make that lesson in a manual mine by study, faith, and prayer.

To give a lesson well prepared is like mercy—it blesses him that gives and him that receives. It is true in teaching as in life—“Give to the world the best you have, and the best will come back to you.” ...

... Teachers, begin the preparation of your lessons in prayer. Teach your lessons with a prayerful heart. Then pray that God will enrich your message in the souls of your children through the influence of his Holy Spirit.

Source: *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: David O. McKay*, 20: Teaching, a Noble Work