

Church Visitation Questions **(Updated August 2018)**

Preliminaries:

The Classis shall appoint at least two senior ministers as Church Visitors (see CO Art 45), to visit each church annually. The date set for the visit must allow sufficient time for the Session to prepare thoroughly for the visitation. Much of the benefit of the Church Visitation will be in the way the Session interacts on the questions before the visit. The questions below would provide excellent material for a Session retreat.

The meeting with the Church Visitors should be announced to the congregation. Congregation members should have the opportunity to meet with the Church Visitors if they have concerns that they have already discussed with the Session but have not yet been satisfactorily resolved.

It is expected that the minister/s, elders and deacons will attend the meeting, with an attendance of not less than 75% of the full session. The Church Visitors should take a full record of the discussions, submitting this to the Session for approval after the meeting. Once agreed upon, this record of the meeting will be submitted to Classis.

Sessions should be frank and open with the Church Visitors and identify any areas of difficulty or tension in church life that threaten the well-being of the church and the work of the gospel.

Key areas of Interaction:

The areas of discussion and interaction identified below are shaped around the CRCA fourfold mission task. The intention is not that Sessions try to give “right” answers, but that they think carefully and interact honestly on how the church is doing in its gospel calling.

1. Prayer and Worship

- a. *Evaluate your church’s commitment to prayer and the things you are doing to encourage a spirit of absolute dependence on God in all things. In what specific ways does your church particularly engage in prayer for the lost, calling upon God for spiritual awakening and great gospel harvest?*
- b. *Describe your approach to public worship. What style of worship are you cultivating and why? How do you assess the health of your worship services? In what ways are you seeking to evidence a Reformed view of worship?*
- c. *Assess the preaching ministry – what are its strengths and weaknesses, its focus and its effectiveness? Who is involved in the preaching ministry? Are new preachers being trained in any way? Is the preaching ministry regularly evaluated by the elders?*

2. Multiplication of Ministry

- a. *Is your church growing? Why or why not? What are your strategies and plans for growth and/or church planting?*
- b. *Evaluate your church's commitment to mission both locally and overseas. Reflect on the extent to which a mission-mindedness lives in the congregation. Describe the kinds of evangelistic outreach being used.*
- c. *How effective is your diaconal ministry in meeting needs both within the church and in your local community? How well connected is your church to its local community? What initiatives have you taken to discern and meet specific needs in the community and to bring to it the hope of the gospel?*
- d. *What do you do to encourage the multiplication of ministry according to people's gifts and the church's resources? What new ministries are currently being developed and resourced?*
- e. *What is the Session's vision for the future development of the church? What specific goals have you decided on for the next twelve months? What do you hope the Lord will enable you to achieve in the next five to ten years?*
- f. *In what ways does the church encourage and teach a Christian world and life view? What Kingdom ministries (including Christian education) does the church support and encourage?*
- g. *Are there any significant problems in the life of the church that are impeding the work of the gospel?*

3. Training for Ministry

a. *Leadership – Training and Oversight:*

Evaluate your effectiveness in training elders, deacons and ministry leaders. What approaches and resources do you use?

Do you have a sufficient number of elders and other leaders for the congregation? What are you doing to raise up future leaders for your local church and beyond?

Evaluate the effectiveness of the mentoring, accountability structures and professional development opportunities provided for the minister/s.

Do you conduct regular reviews of the work of the minister/s and other ministry workers? How do you do this?

Evaluate the Session's effectiveness in working together as a team so that there is ongoing encouragement, accountability, training, strategic use of differing gifts, etc.

Is there serious oversight of the doctrine and life of the minister/s, elders and deacons?

Which form of pastoral support has your minister/s chosen to provide support for him (and his family) in ministry?

b. *Discipleship:*

Describe the ways in which you disciple/train children, young people, new Christians and established members (this will include discussion of your approach to children's ministry/Sunday School, youth ministry and catechism, mentoring, small groups etc.). How effective are these approaches in taking people on to Christian maturity?

c. *Pastoral Care:*

Describe your approach to pastoral care, outlining the role of the minister, elders, deacons and any other people, teams or structures involved in pastoral care. Evaluate the effectiveness of the care in not only providing comfort for the needy but in taking people on to maturity in Christ and readiness to serve him.

4. Alignment

a. *Local church alignment:*

Evaluate the alignment of your local church structures to your church vision. Are your structures (committees, classes, small groups, programs, etc.) effective and appropriate for what you are trying to achieve? How do you review them and what changes have you made in the last year?

b. *Denominational alignment:*

Evaluate the alignment of your local church to the CRCA Church Order and synodical decisions. You should note any places where you depart from the Church Order and synodical decisions, the reasons why and the ways you have addressed those departures.

Your reflection should include such matters as:

- *regularity of Session meetings (CO Art 33);*
- *the practice of Mutual Censure (CO Art 33);*
- *separation of the Diaconate if women are ordained as deacons (CO Art 31);*
- *worship services twice each Sunday (CO Art 56);*
- *use of the prescribed liturgical forms and approved Bible versions (CO Art 57);*
- *regular confessional preaching (CO Art 59);*
- *regularity of the Lord's Supper (CO Art 63);*
- *taking up of prescribed offerings (CO Art 64);*
- *instruction of youth in the Scriptures and confessions (CO Art 65);*
- *visiting of the congregation by the pastor and elders (CO Art 66);*
- *use of the Form of Subscription (CO Art 5);*
- *use of correct membership transfer procedures (CO Art 68);*
- *Session approved marriages only (CO Art 70);*
- *use of the correct disciplinary procedures (CO Art 76-85).*

5. Stewardship

- a. *Evaluate the church's patterns of giving and the financial health and priorities of the congregation.*
- b. *Provide current church statistics on membership (communicant and baptised), worship attendance, transfers, Professions of Faith, baptisms, weddings, the number of elders and deacons, and the frequency of session and congregational meetings.*
- c. *What policies are in place for child protection? What other policies are in place in order to ensure compliance with Government regulations?*
- d. *Provide evidence of audited accounts, the Form of Subscription signed by office bearers, appropriate membership records, and appropriate meeting minutes and archives.*
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