

**PASTORAL PRACTICE POLICY ON VISITATION IN THE PARISH  
St. Luke Lutheran Church Bloomsburg, PA**

**From St. Luke Lutheran Church constitution, adopted 12/2005:**

**\*C9.03.**Consistent with the faith and practice of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America,

a. Every ordained minister shall:

- 1) preach the Word;
- 2) administer the sacraments;
- 3) conduct public worship;
- 4) provide pastoral care; and
- 5) speak publicly to the world in solidarity with the poor and oppressed, calling for justice and proclaiming God's love for the world.

b. Each ordained minister with a congregational call shall, within the congregation:

- 1) offer instruction, confirm, marry, visit the sick and distressed, and bury the dead;
- 2) supervise all schools and organizations of this congregation;
- 3) install regularly elected members of the Congregation Council; and
- 4) with the council, administer discipline.

c. Every pastor shall:

- 1) strive to extend the Kingdom of God in the community, in the nation, and abroad;
- 2) seek out and encourage qualified persons to prepare for the ministry of the Gospel;
- 3) impart knowledge of this church and its wider ministry through distribution of its periodicals and other publications; and
- 4) endeavor to increase the support given by the congregation to the work of the churchwide organization of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) and of the Upper Susquehanna Synod of the ELCA.

Whereas article C9.03.a.4 requires that “every ordained minister shall provide pastoral care” and C9.03.b1 requires that “each ordained minister with a congregational call shall, within the congregation: visit the sick and distressed” careful definition to the terms “care” and “visit” must be provided by the pastor and the congregation council. The spiritual well being of the congregants is imperative in a church/pastor/parishioner relationship. However care must be exercised to protect the privacy of the individual and the integrity of the pastor.

The following descriptive practice was approved by the Congregation Council of St. Luke Lutheran Church on March 13, 2006:

The pastor(s) of St. Luke Church shall:

I. Provide spiritual guidance and conversation upon request of a congregant:

- a. Congregants shall contact the Church Office, or speak to the pastor in person to set up a suitable time to meet with the pastor.

- b. Means of contact (phone numbers, e-mail addresses, etc.) shall be regularly published in the congregation's information documents.
- c. Although in some cases the pastor may meet in the congregant's home it is preferable to meet with the pastor in the church facility. This provides a level of liability protection to the pastor and to the congregants.

## II. Provide spiritual care to the homebound and institutionalized:

- a. Realizing that the role of ministering is not solely that of the pastor but also the congregants, but also realizing that contact between the pastor and those who are homebound or institutionalized is an important connection in the ongoing faith of those persons, the pastor shall:
  - 1. Work to recruit and train parish visitors who will be authorized to offer the sacrament of Holy Communion to the homebound and institutionalized.
  - 2. Personally provide Holy Communion to the homebound and institutionalized at least 6 times per year (shared by pastors), and additional times by lay visitors.
- b. It is necessary for the individual or a family member, so authorized, to contact and inform the pastor when that person feels that they are no longer able to attend church and wish to receive home communion.
- c. In the times when the pastor offers home communion to someone who is homebound, the church secretary shall call to make an advance appointment on behalf of the pastor.

## III. Provide spiritual care to the hospitalized:

- a. When someone is aware that they are going to be hospitalized and desire a pastoral visit they should inform the pastor in person, or by calling the church office to inform the pastor of their hospital stay. (Discretion should be practiced in responding to information provided by an unauthorized third party).
- b. In the event of emergency hospitalization a family member or someone authorized by the individual must contact the pastor or the church office.
- c. When contacting the pastor or church office please provide the following information:
  - 1. Which hospital
  - 2. Complete name (do not use nicknames)
  - 3. Room number (if it has been assigned)
  - 4. Any special conditions
- d. Depending upon the severity of the illness and the distance to the hospital, the pastor may be expected to visit once within a four day hospital stay from the time he is informed.

- e. In the event of hospitalization at a lengthy distance from Bloomsburg, the pastor may contact another ELCA pastor in the community of the hospital to provide pastoral care.

IV. Provide pastoral care in times of death:

- a. If the pastor is to be the officiant at the Service of Christian Burial, it is expected that the family shall contact the pastor about the death.
- b. The pastor in consultation with the family shall mutually agree upon the date, time and place for the service.
- c. The pastor shall contact the family concerning particular elements of the funeral service (with the understanding that the pastor reserves the right to conduct the service within the guidelines of the ELCA's rubrics for worship at Christian Burial).
- d. In the event of a death of a non-member whose family member is a congregant it is the responsibility of the congregant to inform the pastor and request whatever spiritual guidance is needed. (ELCA practice prohibits pastors from intervening in official functions wherein the individual is not a member of the pastor's congregation).
- e. The pastor and congregation may provide care and support for the congregant as requested and a supporting role to a non-member in consultation with the minister of the deceased.

V. Provide pastoral care in the event of long term at-home recuperation following illness:

- a. The individual or a family member, so authorized, shall contact the pastor to inform of the longer term recuperation.
- b. The pastor may be expected to provide home communion once in a two month recuperation.
- c. Parish visitors may provide communion on a more frequent basis.

VI. General provisions:

- a. In all situations confidentiality is to be maintained on the part of the pastor. Any request to provide names of those who receive spiritual care or the content of the conversations shall be considered inappropriate.
- b. It shall not be expected that the pastor call upon a congregant without the congregant's informing the pastor of a need for spiritual care.
- c. Referrals for care from another congregant need to have the individual's permission in order to be acted upon.
- d. There are occasions when the pastor(s) are invited to a congregant's home for a social event. These invitations are always welcomed.
- e. The Job Descriptions of the Senior and Associate Pastors prevail in all situations. Response to all requests will be determined by the pastors.

