

Commissioned Templar Chaplain Program
Unit 11, Part 2
Community Visitation Plan

Objective: to visit and minister to inactive or infirm companions. Preferably out of their dwellings or living facilities. Then to report the details of each visit, respecting the companion's privacy, at the next Stated Convocation.

Periodicity: at least one member per month.

Team: at least two healthy members with their own vehicles or other suitable means of transportation.

Training:

1. Obtain permission from the inactive or infirm companion and inform the High Priest of the plan.
2. Dress conservatively and appropriately for the occasion. Nicer settings require a coat and tie, while for a visit in a park or casual restaurant a polo shirt and slacks would be acceptable. Certainly, don't wear outer clothing with provocative, sexual or lurid messages thereon.
3. Ascertain the companion's religious faith, but don't preach, even if it's your faith too. Leave that to the professionals. Exercise universal, kindness, brotherhood and humility. Let God and His Holy men take care of the doctrine and dogma.
4. Presence, listening and embracing silence. The hallmarks of compassion.
5. Never visit someone's home unaccompanied by a team member. A second team member is even strongly advised when outside a home, i.e. nursing home, restaurant, public park.
6. Basic understanding of HIPAA, FERPA and CAPTA. With special emphasis on privileged communication and what must be reported to the police. Also, the GLOVA "Social Media, Public Relations and Information Technology Policy" of 2016.
7. Vulnerable people, privacy and mandatory reporting.
8. Suicide Prevention and Intervention. Website: 988lifeline.org or call 988.

Definition of Terms:

1. CAPTA. The "Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act" of 1974. Abuse, neglect, sexual exploitation of minors must be reported to the authorities. Check local laws, but most places it is a mandatory reporting requirement. By the way, while visiting you might find an abused or neglected child that needs your assistance under this act. Call 911 if it's an emergency. Otherwise 1-800-4-A-CHILD or 800-4224453.
2. Embracing silence. Just being there is helpful. The ministry of presence as it is called. We needn't constantly talk. In radio and TV they abhor dead air space, but for us many men feel the presence of God in moments of silence. Soft words and silence are far better than trite and inappropriate phrase like, "did he suffer long" or "he's in a better place now." Act in keeping with the distressed companion's expressions. If he asks for a Biblical reading oblige him, but do not do it on your own and if he merely wants to hold your hand and mutter a little, humbly listen.

3. FERPA. The “Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act” of 1974. It mandates privacy protection for student records, without exception for age. Do not disclose such information to others, without the expressed permission of the individual concerned. Tell no tales about financial struggles, grades, famous classmates etc. Mum’s the word.
4. HIPAA. The “Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act” of 2003. Rules about a person’s health and the sharing thereof. Basically, don’t share such information unless you have the expressed permission of the individual or those legally assisting them, i.e. power of attorney over a person mentally incapable of acting on their own behalf.
5. Listening. There are basically two types: comprehension and responsive. Chaplains listen to comprehend the situation. Listening to understand per se. Braggarts, boasters and boors listen to respond. They aren’t that interested in the situation. They are attentive for an opportunity to interrupt, blurt out or otherwise inappropriately show off. They are the type who might interrupt a grieving person’s lamentation with something like “I know exactly how you feel” or “I lost my father last year.” Totally disrespectful to the one in pain. Drawing attention to themselves (emphasis on “I”) and ruinous to the solace necessary at the time.
6. Minister. For this purpose, use it as an intransitive verb: to give aid or service. We aren’t ordained ministers nor holders of theological degrees and we mustn’t pretend to be. However, we have a duty as men and Masons to minister to mankind in general. Masonically it includes helper, healer, communicator, peacemaker, educator and friend.
7. Privileged communication. The person sharing has the right to privacy. Chaplains occupy a position of trust and must have an unsullied reputation for keeping secrets. Unless they violate the law. Basically, the person sharing may talk about themselves, but we must not. See the GLOVA’s IT and privacy rules about this.
8. Vulnerable people. In general, a minor or anybody who due to physical or mental disabilities is unable to look out for themselves or are in anyway subject to abuse or neglect. We are protectors of vulnerable people. Two good courses of instruction on this are the “Boy Scouts of America Youth Protection Training” and “Safeguarding god’s children” by the Episcopal Pension Fund. An internet search should quickly find them. Remember, people can be vulnerable at any age, gender or size. The child abuse number is above. Eldercare number: 1-800-677-1116. For any emergency call 911.

Finally: Seek guidance from professionals or wiser Masons than me.

Fraternally,
Frederick R. Dixon, Sr.
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