



VISITING ECUMENICAL SITUATIONS

BEFORE THE VISIT

Good Practice for Visitors

The key point

Remember that you are here primarily to listen and to help people reflect on their experience. So talk as little as possible! As soon as you begin to preach or share your own experience, you have stopped listening and stopped being helpful. Resist the temptation.

So take time to pray before you go to the place you are visiting, asking that everything be for the greater glory of God and for the furtherance of the Kingdom.

Some things to bear in mind

- Use all your senses to help you learn about the situation. See the diversity of contexts, social situations, notice-boards. It may help to drive or walk round the local area before you knock on the door. Make sure you read all the background information that you are given.
- Try to notice what's missing. The visit team needs a purpose and a focus, but you also need to keep an open mind and notice the contradictions between the reality and what is being said.
- Be aware that, though you will note possible improvements, this visit is a ministry of affirmation and encouragement. You will do that primarily by being there, by encouraging people to talk, and by listening well. Don't talk too much yourself!
- A break during the visit or a careful structure is important to enable people to move to other issues.
- At some point during the visit acknowledge explicitly the generosity of people in welcoming visitors. It is always time-consuming and sometimes nerve-wracking.
- The hints on the following pages may help you gain as complete a picture as possible of the situation you are visiting. You may wish to use the chart on the final page for your notes during and after the visit.

DURING THE VISIT

Context

- Get a feel for the place - a general picture of what's happening
- What is the history/story/background to this place?
- Daily/weekly programme of activities?
- Who are the strategic people? Who is talking to you? Who is silent? Who is absent?
- What kind of numbers of people are we talking about?
- Is there a mission statement?
- What is the area/neighbourhood like?

People

- Pick up the vibes of those you talk to - are they positive or negative?
- Talk to both those running the situation and those on the receiving end - if possible talk to the two groups separately
- Try to see people in groups and individually
- Is the leadership settled? Does the leader want to move on? Is the leadership vacant?

God

- Listen for expressions indicating a theological as well as a sociological understanding - be careful not to lead the witness though! Maybe no-one will say anything, which is also useful.
- What shape does worship take? What resources and traditions inform it?
- How is God's presence and activity experienced and celebrated in this place? How hopeful do people feel?

Mission

- What do you regard as a sign of the Kingdom? What are the Gospel values to look for?
- How is the situation (whether articulated or not) a sign of the Kingdom?
- Is there a sense of 'forward in mission' or postponing decline?

Structures

- What is the denominational picture? How are the relationships?
- Is the sponsoring/managing role delivering what's required?
- How genuinely participatory is it? Is it done *for* or *with* the people?
- Who cares for the carers? How is this set up?
- Are there financial issues? What would happen if there were cutbacks in funding?
- What safety nets are there for when things go wrong? (Constitution, regulations, strategies etc.)

AFTER THE VISIT

Take time to reflect on what you have heard and seen. Pray for those you have met and ask yourself what the visit says to you and your own ecumenical context.

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