



A PASTORAL VISITATION GUIDE

Off to the Hospital

Preparing the heart before entering the
patient's room

CHAPLAIN MANNIE GOMEZ

A ministry for the whole person.

Spiritual care supports people through the familiar trials of life: illness, surgery, incapacitation, death, and bereavement. It offers the presence of Jesus Christ in moments when life feels especially fragile.

Christ's concern embraces the total person—the physical, social, emotional, and spiritual dimensions of human life.

Pastoral care begins by seeing a person, not merely a condition.

The door is open.

This guide was prepared to help those who sense a calling to hospital ministry.

The church has long been welcomed into hospitals to visit and pray for its own members. Today, the opportunity reaches farther: with proper authorization and training, pastoral care can be offered respectfully to people of many faiths and backgrounds.

The church owes its appointed caregivers the preparation and support needed to serve well. Recognition and encouragement from the Department of Social Assistance, Bishop Victor Prado, and Federal Prison Chaplain Benjamin Carrillo have been a blessing to this ministry.

The visit begins before the door.

The value of a pastoral visit is often revealed through the visitor's attitude—and patients usually recognize that attitude quickly.

Too often, a visit is made without considering how or why it should happen. That can cause more harm than good.

1. A patient may be exhausted after a weekend filled with visitors.
2. Inappropriate words from a pastoral visitor can deepen a patient's discouragement.
3. The visitor must ask whether the purpose is to understand the patient's needs or satisfy their own.

BE HONEST. ASK YOURSELF:

“Why am I going?”

A thoughtful answer protects the patient from becoming the object of someone else’s duty, guilt, curiosity, or need for recognition.

The patient’s need—not the visitor’s ego—must shape the visit.

Out of duty?

Is the visit simply meant to make the patient happy—or to release guilt over an unfulfilled responsibility?

A visit can become self-serving when it is used to prove that we are doing good, build a reputation, or seek praise for the inconvenience involved.

The duty visit lacks a vital component of pastoral care: **spiritual sensitivity**.

Let compassion replace performance.

Go because you are prepared to listen, notice, and respond—not because you need the visit to say something favorable about you.

The mantle accepted.

To accept the mantle of hospital visitation is to accept the responsibilities and duties that come with it.

An appointed visitor works within a defined framework. Yet clergy and lay pastoral caregivers can fall into the trap of merely “flying the flag”—arriving to perform expected functions such as reading Scripture or praying without first understanding the patient’s needs.

At a particular stage of hospitalization, even a familiar spiritual practice may be poorly timed. Approach the bedside naturally, respect the patient’s care, and remain sensitive to what the moment can hold.

An inappropriate approach can unintentionally draw a patient farther away.

To cheer up the patient?

Remember that a person receiving hospital treatment is not well. Illness and treatment can affect the whole person—body, mind, and spirit.

Rest and sleep are essential parts of recovery. A patient is not there to be entertained according to a visitor's desires or plans.

What is required is not a performance, but an understanding heart.

Follow the patient's pace.

Notice fatigue. Welcome silence. Keep the visit brief when needed, and never confuse constant talking with meaningful care.

Curiosity and competition.

Hospitals and illness hold an unusual fascination for some people. A visitor can become preoccupied with symptoms, treatments, and private details rather than the person who is suffering.

Some seek information from honest, loving concern. Others gather it to gossip at the cost of another person's pain, suffering, or death. Such visits rarely bring support, comfort, or strength.

Curiosity and competition have no place in hospital ministry. Confidentiality, humility, and sincere care must guide every conversation.

Before every visit

Go with sincerity.

A hospital visit must be offered with a genuine desire to provide positive pastoral care.

Listen before speaking.

Respect rest and privacy.

Let the patient set the pace.

Carry hope without taking over the story.

Hospital Chaplains · Chaplain Mannie Gomez