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Where Did My Home and Visiting Teachers Go?

The flexibility of ministering should encourage us to show greater caring, not lead us to relax.

One of my friends recently asked me in bewilderment, “Where did my visiting teachers go?” From the time her husband passed away, they had been so caring and attentive, but since the announcement of the new ministering program at general conference in April 2018, she hasn’t seen hide nor hair of them.

We are all adjusting to a new way of doing things, and some ministering brothers and sisters may not have understood that although a home visit isn’t the only way to minister, it is certainly a wonderful way to show love and genuine interest—and many members still need it.

Putting *Why* over *How*

For some, the problem may be misunderstanding the purpose of the change. The purpose

behind replacing home and visiting teaching with ministering wasn’t simply to change *how*

we take care of each other but to help us be more guided by *why*.

The ultimate goal of our ministering is to help others become more deeply converted to the Savior Jesus Christ and grow toward their divine potential. The program’s added flexibility isn’t meant to encourage relaxing our efforts; it’s meant to provide greater opportunity for the Spirit to guide our efforts.

So whether or not someone needs a visit today should be based in large part on what will help them move forward on Heavenly Father’s path for them.

Learning Together

Despite the initial uncertainty about what is expected of us as we minister, our sisters and brothers are reaching out to one another. Wherever I’ve traveled, it has been exciting to hear from countless women (and many men) sharing their stories of the positive impact their ministering—or being ministered to—is having on relationships and personal growth.

I recently came back from North Carolina, USA, where a ward Relief Society president shared some ideas she had received from stake leaders. With a few clarifications, I thought they were spot on and worth sharing.





“A NEWER, HOLIER APPROACH”

This chart represents the way some members had come to perceive the old program, compared to how we hope all will understand what it means to minister.

OLD

Home and visiting teaching

Motivated by duty

Box*

What do I do?

Focus on process

CHECK IT OFF

Focus on the task

Once-a-month visit

Bring a set message

What counts as a visit?

Assigned to brothers and sisters

Report that it's done

NEW

Ministering

Motivated by love

Pearl

Why do I do?

Focus on outcome

KEEP CHECKING IN

Focus on the person

Simple, flexible contact(s)

Spirit-led gospel sharing

Accountable for spiritual welfare

Entrusted with brothers and sisters

Change hearts

* A parable is told of a jeweler who had a precious pearl but was saddened when the people who came to see it focused more on the beautiful box it sat in rather than the pearl itself. Similarly, as we shift from home and visiting teaching to ministering, we can better focus on the “pearls” of meaningful ministering rather than the “box” of policy and procedure.

HOW TO HAVE SUCCESSFUL MINISTERING INTERVIEWS

In the digital version of this article, Sister Bingham shares five guidelines for helpful ministering interviews. Visit lds.org/go/121813.

Keep Going

We are all learning together as we embrace “a newer, holier approach” to ministering.¹ Perhaps some of us feel overwhelmed or intimidated. It helps to remember that “newer and holier” does not mean “flawless and unachievable.”

Whether you are still uncertain about the purposes of ministering and how it works or you think you have it down, I invite you to watch and read the resources at ministering.lds.org and study the Ministering Principles articles published each month in the *Ensign* and *Liahona* (see page 8

in this issue). These materials will help align your ministering efforts with the Savior’s work.

Thank you, wonderful sisters and brothers, for loving and caring and reaching out and giving of yourselves. You are truly remarkable, and your ministering will be “something extraordinary”!² ■

NOTES

1. Russell M. Nelson, “Ministering,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, May 2018, 100.
2. Emma Smith, in *Daughters in My Kingdom: The History and Work of Relief Society* (2011), 14.

