

“Pastoral Lapse in Hospital Visitation”

Dear Antwort Mann,

I was recently in the hospital for four days and my pastor never visited me. I'm kind of upset about that. It makes me think he doesn't care. How should I handle this?

Signed,

“Patient, but Disappointed,”

Dear “Patient,”

Since you really haven't given me much information to go on, I'm going to ask some questions for you to consider which may, or may not change how you are feeling toward your pastor and his failure to visit you.

Are you sure that he knew you were in the hospital? How do you know? Did you or a family member talk to him directly about your hospitalization? If you did tell him, was it in the greeting line after church, or at some other time? What else might have been going on at church during the time you were in the hospital? Was there a funeral, or some other crisis that occupied your pastor's time and attention? How far away from the church was the hospital?

People often think that the pastor should just know that they are in the hospital, or they assume that the hospital calls the pastor when one of his members is admitted. But under HIPAA law, unless the hospital is directly given permission by the patient, they legally cannot inform anyone, including the pastor, of a patient's presence or condition. Simply putting on your admittance form that you are a Lutheran, or a member of a particular congregation does not free the hospital to contact a pastor. And remember: Pastors are not clairvoyant. They don't *just know* when folks are in the hospital, or are having other issues.

Also, many assume that someone in the family will make contact with the pastor when, in reality, family members are often so occupied with their loved one's situation that they rarely think about calling the pastor, so it never gets done.

And please understand that, when a pastor is greeting folks after the Service, it is a very busy and confusing time with many people telling him many things. He probably won't remember most of what was said to him afterwards, especially if he's running off to Bible Class or some other meeting. If it's truly important for you to have him know about your upcoming hospitalization or procedure, give him a note about it as you greet him in the line or, if possible, call the church later that day or week.

Now, if he did know, and simply neglected to come, then that certainly is a different issue. But in any event, you asked what you should do about this situation. My best advice to you is to follow Matthew 18: Go and talk to him. Don't confront him in anger or in an accusatory tone. Just meet with him, or phone him, and express your concern that you weren't visited. And listen with an open mind to what he has to say. Perhaps after talking to him you will see things in a better light. Or, if indeed he was remiss, he can

ask your forgiveness (and receive it from you) so that you may be reconciled with each other. Whatever you do, do not let this one disappointment keep you away from receiving God's gifts for you in the Divine Service from the hands of your pastor.

“We should fear and love God so that we . . . Defend [our neighbor], speak well of him and explain everything in the kindest way” Small Catechism, Explanation to the 8th Commandment

Best regards,

Der Antwort Mann

Kids and adults are encouraged to send their questions to Der Antwort Mann for publication in the newsletter. These questions can be sent to, or dropped off at church.