

CUSTOMARY FOR BISHOP VISITATIONS

The regular pastoral visitation of all parishes and worshiping communities of the diocese is among the principal responsibilities of the Bishop's ministry. It is also one of the great delights of the episcopal office. It is desirable for the pastoral visitation to be at once both business as usual and a special occasion in the life of the parish. In a liturgical-sacramental church such as ours, these are not competing interests.

On Arrival at the Church

The Bishop will typically arrive 30 minutes before the service. Staying through the coffee hour/reception after the final liturgy is figured into the Bishop's Sunday schedule.

- Reserve a parking space, when possible or appropriate.
- Assign a host or hostess in advance.
- Give the host/hostess specific instructions on where the Bishop may go for a moment to relax and be refreshed after the trip in preparation for the worship occasion, particularly if the trip is one hour or more.

The Liturgy of the Day

It is preferred to merge the morning liturgies into one, where space is available. An occasional opportunity to merge the whole parish together is good, and there is perhaps no better time than the Bishop's visitation. This also means there is more time for the Bishop to attend adult forums, meetings with youth and children, and to spend time with the Vestry. The Bishop will be happy to meet with any configuration of parishioners during the education hour. It can be an open forum, teaching the Scriptures and Prayer Book, or a presentation on another subject. The time can also simply be used for the Bishop and parishioners to enjoy fellowship.

It is anticipated that all visitations will be celebrations of the Holy Eucharist. When there are no baptisms, confirmations, or receptions, the liturgy on the day should include the renewal of baptismal vows. This should be substituted for the Nicene Creed at all services, even those that are otherwise Rite I.

The Proper of the Day will be used, even when initiation rites are to take place, and normally the liturgical color will be that of the day. Any departure from this should be discussed before the day of the visitation. For visitation during "ordinary time" that will include one or more of the rites of initiation, any of the following texts may be substituted for the second (epistle) reading: Romans 6:3-5 (6-11); Romans 8:14-17; Romans 12:1-8; Galatians 5:16-25; Ephesians 4:7, 11-16. If these substitutions are made, please inform the Bishop's Office no less than one week before the visitation. The Revised Common Lectionary (Episcopal Edition) is the norm in the Diocese of Atlanta. If it seems appropriate to use other readings, this must be cleared with the Bishop well in advance of the visitation. The Bishop does not do children's sermons, but he is always happy to spend time with the children in the parish in other contexts.

It is not the Bishop's practice to sing the liturgy.

The Bishop brings his own vestments and carries his pastoral staff. *The Bishop will anticipate wearing a chasuble and stole from the parish unless notified in advance.*

Because every liturgical space has its own challenges, the Bishop will generally preside from the place/chair from which it is normally done. He prefers to stand for confirmations and receptions, so the bishop's chair need not be front and center except in unusual circumstances.

If the parish has a deacon (or two), they should be prepared to assist. The details will vary, but will normally include such things as: holding the Prayer Book so that the Bishop's hands are free for liturgical gestures; holding the pastoral staff when we are not in procession; and assisting with chrism at baptisms. In the absence of a deacon, these duties may be performed by a senior acolyte or assisting lay minister. Except under unusual circumstances, these duties are not to be performed by clergy. A "Bishop's Chaplain" is a liturgical anachronism born of the era when the diaconate had been suppressed and is generally unnecessary.

The Rector, Vicar, or Priest-in-Charge should make the necessary parish announcements. While it is always pleasant to be greeted, it is preferred that the language of "welcome" not be used. Such language tends to imply that the Bishop is an alien from some foreign place, not the chief pastor of the diocese. He is not a guest.

Please remind the congregation that the undesignated offering goes to the Bishop's discretionary fund for support of emergencies and non-budgeted ministries that arise in the course of the year. He resumes the liturgy with the offertory sentence.

Baptisms

The Pastoral Visitation of the Bishop is one of the principal times for baptism and every effort should be made to make the visitation a baptismal feast, in contrast to an occasion for confirmation and reception alone.

Unless the space militates against it, the baptismal liturgy should unfold as follows:

- + Presentation of the candidates, interrogation, and the baptismal covenant will be conducted from the chancel steps (or the equivalent)
- + During the litany (the prayer for the candidates), we will process to the font in the following manner: the deacon or acolyte bearing the paschal candle; the bishop; presbyters, deacons, and assisting clergy; baptismal candidates and sponsors; and the congregation where practicable.
- + The Bishop will bless the water and normally say the thanksgiving over the water. The altar book should be available for the blessing of the water.
- + One or more of the presbyters should do the water bath.
- + The newly baptized (or their sponsors in the case of babies and small children) are given a candle lighted from the paschal candle for the procession back to the altar.
- + The procession back to the altar takes place in the same order as above.
- + The prayer for the gifts of the Holy Spirit and the chrismation will take place before the altar. Please make the chrism available in some sort of vessel worthy of the public celebration of the liturgy. Oil stocks are for pastoral, not liturgical use.

Confirmation, Reception, Reaffirmation

We will continue to schedule diocesan-wide liturgies for confirmation and reception. These liturgies will be scheduled no less than twice a year, at the Cathedral of St. Philip. Although the Bishop will continue to perform these rites at visitations when requested, it is his preference that we continue to disconnect the visitation of the Bishop from confirmation and reception, and instead to emphasize the Sacraments of Holy Baptism and Holy Eucharist. Many in the diocese, lay and clergy, have spoken positively of their experience of the diocesan-wide liturgies and have expressed their hope that they will continue. One of the benefits of such services is that it helps to erode the notion that we are a congregational church and helps to underscore that in committing to this Church, one is related to and committed to the Body of Christ beyond the local parish.

The question of who should be confirmed, who should be received, and who should be reaffirmed is not as complicated as it once was. Changes made in the canons with respect to church membership by the General Convention of 1985, and refined in 1988, have made this fairly simple in practical application. Please abide by these changes.

- Confirmation is for children who were baptized in the Episcopal Church or who came to this church with their families before making a “mature commitment.”
- Confirmation is also appropriate for those of any age who are making a mature commitment for the first time.
- Reception is for those who have previously made a mature commitment in any other Christian church, regardless of the pedigree of the minister. The previous practice of receiving Roman Catholics and Orthodox Christians, and confirming everyone else, no longer applies. The requirement of Called to Common Mission, that we receive ELCA Lutherans and not confirm them, is not an exception to the canonical position, but is consistent with it. Since the canons require that all persons come “under the hands” of the bishop, persons who are received are, for canonical purposes, understood to be confirmed.

Candidates may come in the most convenient order. Name tags are preferable to cards to identify the names of candidates. Chrism is not used for confirmation. In the New Testament, anointing is associated with Baptism. In the Prayer Book, the use of chrism occurs only in the baptismal liturgy, while the laying on of hands is associated with confirmation. In order to comply with the changes in the canons on church membership, the laying on of hands will be used for reception and reaffirmation as well as confirmation.

After planning of the service is complete, please submit the CHECKLIST FOR BISHOP VISITATIONS (link) to bishopsassistant@episcopalatlanta.org