



EPISCOPAL DIOCESE OF ATLANTA

Bishop's Customary for Pastoral Visitations

INTRODUCTION

The regular pastoral visitation of all parishes and worshipping 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.

The Bishop is the spiritual and temporal leader of the congregation. As such, the Bishop is not a guest. The Bishop is an extension of the pastoral leadership for the congregation. Whatever the occasion for the visit, the Bishop is there to strengthen the ministry of the local congregation.

It is desirable for the pastoral visitation to be 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. The Bishop's visitation should not be "unusual," no matter how infrequent. The central act of every visitation is the preaching of God's Word and the joint

celebration of the Holy Eucharist with the clergy and people of the parish. All other aspects of the visitation are auxiliary and must never be allowed to overshadow this central purpose.

Although confirmations, receptions, and reaffirmations will continue to take place during visitations, these rites are not the principal reasons for the Bishop's pastoral visitation.

The availability of persons for confirmation or reception need not play any part in the scheduling of the visitation.

SCHEDULING VISITATIONS

Pastoral visitations will be scheduled in such a way as to balance the following priorities:

- the length of time since the last pastoral visitation;
- the need to schedule Episcopal rites: major parish anniversaries, dedications of new buildings, groundbreakings, etc. (Some of these will be scheduled by necessity on days other than Sunday);
- particular pastoral needs of the parish;
- the celebration of the feast of title or another significant event in the life of the parish.

The scheduling of visitations may be initiated by the Rector or Vicar of the parish or by the Bishop's Office. As a rule, a parish will not receive a second regular pastoral visitation until all other parishes have been visited.

In order to facilitate planning, the visitation schedule is created to cover the upcoming six months. You may request upcoming dates, but normally final commitments will not be made more than six months in advance. There will still be some need for flexibility. There will be parish emergencies, personal illness, travel delays, and other things that may require last-minute rescheduling. Changes will be kept to a minimum, but from time to time, they will occur.

ON THE DAY OF THE VISIT

The bishop will make every effort to arrive no less than 30 minutes before the service. If necessary, the bishop will arrive earlier to sign confirmation certificates, prayer books, etc., prior to the start of the service.

Where space is available, the bishop prefers that you merge the morning liturgies into one. An occasional opportunity to merge the whole parish together is good, and there is perhaps no better time than the Bishop's visitation. This will also allow the bishop more time to be flexible with adult forums, meetings with youth and children, spending time with the Vestry or enjoying fellowship with parish members.

THE LITURGY OF THE DAY

All visitations will be celebrations of the Holy Eucharist.

When there are no baptisms, confirmations, or receptions, the liturgy on the day of the bishop's

visitation 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 bishop is always pleased to sing as much of the liturgy as desired.

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 substitutions are made, you must inform the Bishop 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 is always happy to spend time with the children in the parish in other contexts.

The Bishop will bring his own vestments to wear for the service. The bishop will not wear a cope except

when it is appropriate for non-eucharistic liturgies or on those rare occasions when the Bishop is present for the celebration of the Holy Eucharist but is not the principal celebrant.

Because every liturgical space has its own challenges, the Bishop will generally preside from the place/chair from which it is normally done. The Bishop stands for confirmations and receptions, so the bishop's chair need not be front and center.

A deacon (or two) should be prepared to assist the bishop. The assignments will vary but will normally include such duties as, but not limited to:

- holding the Prayer Book so that the Bishop's hands are free for liturgical gestures;
- holding the Bishop's mitre during prayers;
- holding the Bishop's pastoral staff when not in procession;
- 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 presbyters. (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 nice to be greeted, the Bishop prefers not to use the word "welcome."

The Bishop is not a guest.

It should be announced to the congregation that the undesignated offering goes to the Bishop's discretionary fund to support emergencies and non-budgeted ministries that arise during the year.

Do not give the Bishop any money collected. Mail one check, payable to The Diocese of Atlanta, Memo line – Bishop's Discretionary Fund. (Mailing Address: The Diocese of Atlanta 2744 Peachtree Road, Atlanta, GA 30305)

BAPTISMS (BCP pp. 299 – 314)

Unless space prohibits, the baptismal liturgy should unfold as follows:

- A. The presentation of the candidates, interrogation, and the baptismal covenant will be conducted from the chancel steps (or the equivalent).
- B. During the litany (the prayer for the candidates), process to the font in the following manner:
 1. the deacon or acolyte bearing the paschal candle;
 2. the bishop;
 3. presbyters, deacons, and assisting clergy;
 4. baptismal candidates and sponsors;
 5. the congregation where practicable.

- c. The Bishop will bless the water and normally sing the Thanksgiving over the water.
- d. The altar book should be available for the water blessing.
- e. After 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. The prayer for the gifts of the Holy Spirit and the chrismation will occur before the procession back to the altar.

Please notify the Bishop's Office *in advance* if chrism is required before the visitation. Otherwise, the Bishop will conclude that you have an adequate supply.

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

(BCP pp. 413-419)

Diocesan-wide liturgies for confirmation and reception will be scheduled at the Cathedral of St. Philip no less than three times a year, usually in March, June, and December. Although the Bishop will continue to do these rites at visitations when requested, it is the Bishop's preference to disconnect the visitation of the Bishop from confirmation

and reception and instead to emphasize the Sacraments of Holy Baptism and Holy Eucharist.

One of the benefits of the diocesan-wide services is that they help to underscore that in committing to this Church, one is related to and committed to the Body of Christ beyond the local parish.

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:

Confirmation is the public proclamation of faith of baptized persons.

Reception is any baptized person who has become a member of the parish, transferring from another denomination, will be received. 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.

Reaffirmation of Baptismal Vows is anyone who wishes to reaffirm their faith and commitment to their baptismal vows publicly.

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.

When there is to be confirmation, reception, or reaffirmation at a parish visitation, 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, reaffirmation, and confirmation.

Under the present Canons, adults from other Christian traditions should be received, not confirmed. If you continue to abide by the “old tradition” (it was never a canon or a rubric!), we receive only Roman Catholics and Eastern Orthodox and confirm everyone else. You should know that the Prayer Book and Canons laid that aside more than a generation ago. If there are aspects of this you do not understand, please contact the Bishop’s office.

Celebration of New Ministry (BCP 559 -565)

The bishop’s assistant will work with the new rector to schedule the Installation Service. Where practical, the service should be scheduled no more than 90 days after the call.

A sample bulletin and invitation are available as a resource if needed. A draft of the bulletin should be sent to the bishop for review and approval no less than a week before the service.

A copy of the *Letter of Institution* will be emailed to the parish to be included in the service booklet for the bishop. The official letter with the bishop's seal will be sent to the rector.

Contact the Bishop's Office at (404) 601-5352 or bishopsassistant@episcopatlanta.org if questions or additional information is needed.