

THE EPISCOPAL DIOCESE OF GEORGIA

Bishop's Customary for Visitations

Revised May 2011

INTRODUCTION

The regular pastoral visitation of all parishes and missions of the diocese is among the principal responsibilities of my ministry among you. It is my desire for the pastoral visitation to be at once both *business as usual* and a *special occasion* in the life of the parish. The central act of every visitation is the preaching of God's Word and the 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 I do confirmations, receptions, and reaffirmations during visitations, I do not believe these rites are the only reason for the Bishop's Pastoral Visitation. The availability of such candidates need not play a part in the scheduling of the visitation.

SCHEDULING

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

- The length of time since the last visitation;
- The need to schedule episcopal rites: major parish anniversaries, dedications of new buildings, groundbreaking, etc.;
- Particular pastoral needs of the parish;
- The celebration of a patronal feast or other significant event in the parish's life;

The scheduling of visitations may be initiated by the priest of the parish or by the Bishop's Office. As a general rule, I will not return to a parish for a regular visitation until all other parishes have been visited.

In order to facilitate planning, the visitation schedule is created to cover the upcoming year (September – June), and will normally be available in June prior to the year in question. You may request upcoming dates, but normally we will not make final commitments more than a year in advance. Even with great care given to my visitation schedule, there will still be some need for flexibility. There will be emergencies that may require rescheduling. It is my commitment that such changes will be rare.

When it is requested to schedule another bishop for the visitation, such invitations will come from my office. *I do not consider the convenience of parish confirmations and receptions to be adequate reason for scheduling another bishop.*

THE DAY OF THE VISIT

I will make every effort to arrive no less than 30 minutes before the liturgy. In some of our parishes it is necessary to have multiple services. In these cases we will have as many services as necessary. If it is possible to merge the morning liturgies into one (at 10 a.m. or 10:30 a.m.), then that is my preference. An occasional opportunity for the whole parish to worship together is good, and there is perhaps no better time than the Bishop's visitation. This also means there is more time to be flexible with adult forums, meetings with youth and children, and meeting with the Vestry, etc.

I am happy to meet with any configuration of parishioners before or after the service(s). We can have an open forum, teach the Scriptures and Prayer Book, or I can do a presentation on another subject. I can also simply use the time to enjoy fellowship with members of the parish.

Staying through the coffee hour/reception after the final liturgy is figured into my Sunday schedule. I do expect we will have a meeting with the Vestry sometime during my visitation. This will often be on the Saturday evening before my Sunday visitation or, if the visitation is in on Sunday afternoon, then it will be a Sunday supper meeting.

THE LITURGY OF THE DAY

All visitations will be celebrations of the Holy Eucharist.

When there are no baptisms, confirmations, receptions, or reaffirmations 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.

The Proper of the Day will be used, even when initiation rites are to take place. When there are initiation rites the liturgical color will be white. At all other times, it will be the appropriate color of the season. If you have an alternative request, please contact my office a week before the scheduled visitation.

The Revised Common Lectionary is the norm in the Diocese. If you desire to use other readings, this must be cleared with me well in advance of the visitation.

I do not do children's sermons, but I am always happy to spend time with the children in the parish in other contexts.

To emphasize my pastoral relationship, I will normally wear the vestments (stole & chasuble) of the parish. I will bring a plain alb, miter, and crozier.

If the parish has a deacon, she/he should be prepared to assist me. The details will vary, but will normally include such things as:

- Holding the Prayer Book so that my hands are free for liturgical gestures;
- Holding the miter during prayers;
- Holding the crozier when we are not in procession;
- Assisting with baptisms (when there are baptisms, I will preside. The parish

priest, however, will baptize and seal infants and small children. I will baptize and seal teenagers and adults);

In the absence of a deacon, a senior acolyte or assisting lay minister may perform these duties. Except under unusual circumstances priests should not perform these duties.

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

It is important to 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. I will resume the presidency of the liturgy with the offertory sentence.

WHEN THERE ARE BAPTISMS

The Visitation of the Bishop is a principal time for baptism and every effort should be made to make the visitation a baptismal feast, in contrast to an occasion only for confirmation, reception, or reaffirmation. Unless the space does not allow it, the baptismal liturgy should unfold as follows:

- The presentation of the candidates, examination, and the baptismal covenant will be conducted from the chancel steps (or the equivalent);
- After the prayer for the candidates we will process to the font in the following manner: the deacon or acolyte; the bishop; assisting priest(s); then the baptismal candidates and sponsors;
- The bishop will bless the water and say the thanksgiving over the water;
One or more of the priests will do the baptism and chrismation of infants and small children. I will baptize and seal teenagers and adults;
- The newly baptized (or their sponsors in the case of babies and small children) may be given a candle lighted from the paschal candle;

Please notify me *in advance* if chrism is required. Otherwise, I will anticipate an adequate supply. Please make the chrism available in some sort of vessel worthy of the public celebration of the liturgy. It need not be fancy or ornate. Please no prescription medicine bottles or the like.

CONFIRMATION, RECEPTION, REAFFIRMATION

Outline of the Liturgy

The Bishop's Chair should be placed in the center either on the nave level or in the chancel depending on the architecture of the church. Please consult with me prior to the liturgy if you have questions about its placement. I will preside from there until we go to the altar for the Liturgy of the Holy Communion. There should be an appropriate stand for the crozier (if nothing fits, then we can lay the crozier on the altar or lean it against the wall of the sanctuary) and a

small table, if possible, for my miter next to my chair. Before the Offertory, the Chair can be moved to its regular location and the miter and crozier should be moved to the sanctuary.

The Opening Sentences *by season*

The Versicles for baptism (BCP p. 299) or confirmation (BCP p. 413)

Please do not insert the Gloria in excelsis here although the rubrics allow it

The Collect of the Day

Please use the Sunday or, if it is a Feast Day, the collect appointed. If it is a Feria Day, please use the collect of the previous Sunday.

The Lessons

If a hymn or anthem is sung before the Gospel, please only sing it then. Do not divide it up with some of the verses sung after the Gospel is read. There should be no division between the Gospel and sermon.

The Sermon

The Presentation and Examination of the Candidates

Please have an appropriate kneeler available for the candidates' use.

Have the presenters say together, for example "I present these persons for Confirmation: Mary Katherine Jones, John Robert Smith, etc." Even though they are saying it in unison they should use the first person singular. Then have them do the same thing for those being received and reaffirming. I will then examine them all together.

Only the Candidates and their presenters should stand at this time. The congregation should be seated throughout the Presentation and Examination of the Candidates and then stand for the Baptismal Covenant.

The Baptismal Covenant

Prayers for the Candidates

Whoever leads these prayers should be ready to begin them as we finish the Baptismal Covenant. These serve as the Prayers of the People for the Liturgy, so there should be no additional intercessions. If there particular people or circumstances that need special intention, we will offer them at the altar prior to beginning the Great Thanksgiving.

Confirmation, Reception, & Reaffirmation

The question of who should be confirmed, received, or reaffirmed is not complicated. Changes made in the canons with respect to church membership by the General Conventions of 1985 and 1988, have made this fairly simple in practical application:

Confirmation is for people who have received Trinitarian baptism, but who have never made a public, mature commitment to the Christian faith and life. Since the age of maturity differs by individual, I leave it to the Presbyters to determine who is ready for such a commitment.

Reception is for those who have previously made a mature commitment in any other Christian church. The previous practice of only receiving Roman Catholics and Orthodox Christians, and confirming everyone else, no longer applies.

Reaffirmation is for those who have been confirmed in the Episcopal Church, but would like to reaffirm their commitment to Christ and his Church.

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 should come in the most convenient order. Please have them wear prominent nametags or carry index cards that have their names printed as they wished to be confirmed, received, or reaffirmed.

Priests, Deacons, and Lay Presenters should join in the laying on of hands by standing behind the candidates and laying their hands on their shoulders or backs.

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. If you need me to consecrate chrism for use at a future baptism, then I will do so right before the Great Thanksgiving.

The Peace

If there are to be presentations of gifts to the newly confirmed, received, or reaffirmed, please have that scheduled for after the Peace and before the Offertory.

The Liturgy of the Holy Communion

Parish Priest(s) should stand at the altar with me (and the deacon, if one is present) and the priests should concelebrate by extending their hand at the Invocation.

The Great Thanksgiving should be one appointed for Rite II since the language of the Liturgy of the Word is Rite II. My preference is Prayer A during the Season after Pentecost; Prayer B for Advent, Christmas, and the Season after the Epiphany; Prayer C in Lent; and, Prayer D during Eastertide (including Pentecost).

I will need my miter and crozier for the postcommunion prayer and blessing, so the person appointed should bring those to me as the altar is cleared.

After the dismissal, please direct me where you would like me to stand to greet the people.

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

This *Customary* may change over time as I become better acquainted with local customs in the Diocese. That being said, local custom should never trump the canons of the Church or the rubrics of the Book of Common Prayer. I welcome your feedback.

+ Scott
GAX