

Guidelines for the Bishop's Visitation

The Episcopal Diocese of Southern Virginia



A. Visitation Scheduling Procedures

The visitation policy of the Diocese of Southern Virginia seeks to be flexible and to address the pastoral needs of congregations.

Ideally, the Bishop's visitation should suit the programming schedule of the local congregation. If the date requested is available the Bishop will make every effort to grant the request. However, certain factors will be taken into consideration when scheduling requests. Some of these include...

- The date of the most recent visitation - those parishes that have waited longest between visitations will be given first priority.
- Visitations that coincide with special celebrations, such as anniversaries, installation of new leadership, etc... will be given priority when possible.

The canons require that the Bishop visit each congregation at least every three years. While consideration will be given to congregations requesting visitations, should for some reason a parish neglect to request a visitation, a date will be automatically scheduled by the Bishop and the parish notified of that date by the Bishop's secretary.

While parishes are welcome to request specific dates on the Bishop's schedule, dates are not to be considered final until the Bishop's Secretary notifies the parish to that effect. Notifications for the visitation cycles will typically be made in July and November.

The Diocese of Southern Virginia is geographically and numerically one of the larger dioceses in the Episcopal Church. Since at this writing there is only one Bishop available for regular visitations, priority will be given to visiting every congregation within the canonically expected three year period. If the Bishop is unable to visit your congregation within a time frame that suits the parish's program life there are options available to you:

- Confirmants are welcome to attend a confirmation service at a neighboring parish. The Rector or Priest-in-Charge of that neighboring parish should be notified in advance for his or her permission.
- Rectors are permitted to invite a visiting Bishop in good standing in the Episcopal Church from another diocese as long as prior approval is received from the Bishop of Southern Virginia before the invitation is issued. If requested by the parish, the cost of a visiting bishop's visitation will be the responsibility of the parish.
- From time to time, regional confirmations will be scheduled by the Bishop's Office.

Please note: A Bishop's visitation does not have to include the service of Confirmation, but it is expected that all visitations will include the celebration of the Eucharist. Renewal of the Baptismal Covenant (BCP p. 304) in place of the Nicene Creed is appropriate on the day of the Bishop's visitation.

B. Activities during a visitation.

1. Fellowship and educational functions.

- a. The clergy in charge or the senior wardens of vacant congregations are responsible for arranging hospitality and scheduling the bishop's time.
- b. Opportunities for building and deepening personal relationships are encouraged. As time permits, the bishop is available to:
 1. Meet with the vestry or other congregational leadership.
 2. Meet with the candidates and sponsors for baptism, confirmation, reception, or reaffirmation.
 3. Meet with an adult class, or a combination class of adults and teens.
- c. All fellowship and educational functions must be scheduled and coordinated with the visiting bishop well in advance of the visitation.

C. Liturgical guidelines. When in doubt, do what makes sense. These guidelines are adapted from *The Ceremonies of the Eucharist* by Howard Galley (Cowley Publications: Cambridge MA 1989).

1. Generally. The bishop's visitation is an important event in the life of a parish family. It recalls us to the reality that the basic unit of the church is the Diocese, and that all presbyters (priests) serve as the liturgical representatives of the bishop. The bishop's visitation always includes Eucharist. It normally includes confirmation, and is an especially appropriate day for baptism.
2. The form of the liturgy. The bishop will celebrate the Holy Eucharist during the visitation. If there are to be baptisms, confirmations, receptions or re-affirmations, they will be done within the context of the Holy Eucharist.

Other episcopal acts (e.g. Celebration of a New Ministry, Dedication of a Church Building, Blessing of Memorials, etc.) may be scheduled through the bishop's office. Such services will be as specified in the *Book of Common Prayer* and/or *the Book of Occasional Services*.

3. Baptism and Confirmation of adults. If the bishop agrees to baptize and seal a person prepared to make a mature public affirmation of faith, that person is both baptized and confirmed in the one event. It is not necessary for that person to be confirmed as well, for the bishop has already laid hands upon and sealed that person (note the second rubric on page 412, *Book of Common Prayer*). However, for pastoral reasons, an adult who receives baptism may also join his/her Confirmation class for the laying on of hands by the bishop. Please note that a special certificate for "Holy Baptism and Confirmation" is available.

4. **Baptism.** While the bishop is the celebrant of the service and may say the thanksgiving over the water, the priest, as the candidate's pastor, baptizes the candidate(s), unless it is the baptism and confirmation of an adult (see Number 3 above).
5. **Pastoral Offices.** If it is desired that the bishop visit people who are unable to attend the liturgy (sick or shut-in) and perform pastoral offices, this needs to be scheduled well in advance and will be done whenever possible.
6. **Liturgical color.** If there is to be baptism and confirmation, the liturgical color is white or red. If there is to be no confirmation or baptism, the liturgical color of the day is to be used.
7. **Propers** for the day (Revised Common Lectionary) are to be used for the bishop's visitation.
8. **Duration of liturgy.** Please be sensitive to the length of the liturgy, especially if an extension is not specifically required by the *Book of Common Prayer*. For example, please do not sing a hymn after the post-communion prayer if there is to be a hymn at the closing procession; also, in the confirmation service (without baptism) the Prayers for the Candidates (pp. 305-306) may be omitted. Please do not include the Prayers of the People.
 - a. **Dismissal.** After the bishop has blessed the congregation or after the final hymn a deacon or priest should dismiss the congregation. **"Alleluias" should only be used as part of the dismissal from the Easter Vigil through the Day of Pentecost** (BCP pg. 366). Note: while every Sunday is an Easter celebration, not every Sunday falls within the season of Easter.
9. **The Presence of Children in the Liturgy:** When children are present in the liturgy, it is the Bishop's desire to have a few minutes with them up front prior to the homily. Children may come to the front alone or accompanied by their caregivers.
10. **Local clergy and laity.**
 - a. **Participation.** The local clergy and laity (as appropriate) are expected to assist in the service by:
 1. Reading the scriptures,
 2. Leading the intercessions, including appointed prayers from the current Anglican Cycle of Prayer and our Diocesan Prayer Calendar.
 3. Presenting the alms and elements,
 4. Setting the table at the offertory,
 5. Standing at the Altar with the Bishop,
 6. Assisting in the distribution of communion,
 7. Performing the ablutions,
 8. Dismissing the congregation, and,
 9. Such other tasks as authorized by the *Book of Common Prayer*.

b. **Deacons**. If there is a deacon present, he/she is to perform the diaconal functions as specified in the *Book of Common Prayer*. The bishop welcomes the opportunity to have all four orders of ministry serve at the altar (laity, bishop, priest, and deacon). Occasionally the Bishop travels with a Deacon who can perform these diaconal liturgical duties when the parish has no deacon in residence. Additionally the Deacon would address the congregation either during announcements or during another meeting such as a forum, with the goal of explaining the diaconate and inviting discernment as to whether anyone is called to the diaconate. A bulletin insert has been generated for Sundays that a deacon travels with the bishop and we would appreciate it's insertion into the bulletin. (last page of this document)

c. **Lay Eucharistic Ministers**. If there are a sufficient number of ordained persons vested and participating, it is inappropriate (and a violation of church canon) to use Lay Eucharistic Ministers to distribute communion. Otherwise, feel free to use Lay Eucharistic Ministers as you normally do on Sunday.

d. **Bishop's Chaplain**. A Bishop's Chaplain should be appointed by the rector. The Chaplain may be either clergy or lay. The Chaplain's primary role is to carry the Bishop's crozier in the procession and to assist him at Confirmation.

11. **Logistics**.

a. **Generally**. Do what works with your building.

b. **Confirmands kneeling before the bishop**:

1. At the time of confirmation, the candidates kneel singly or in pairs before the bishop. Their sponsors may accompany them and stand to the side. At the time of the laying on of hands, the sponsor may lay a hand on the candidate's shoulder.

2. The bishop prefers to begin the examination seated in the bishop's chair, if that is practical, but will stand for the actual prayer of Confirmation.

c. **Confirmands kneeling along the altar rail**. Alternatively, the bishop is willing to confirm with the class kneeling along the altar rail.

12. **Presenting the candidates**. The presentation of the candidates should be in the presence of the bishop. If the congregation is without the benefit of clergy, the senior warden or other officer of the vestry shall present candidates for confirmation. If there are several candidates, they may be presented from their seats in the front pews of the church. The candidates should be prepared to read the responses clearly and with strength when asked by the Bishop.

13. **Nametags**. Each candidate should use nametags or name cards. The cards should have both the name by which the candidate is called and a notation of what is to be done (e.g. John, Confirmation; or Mary, Reception). Please make sure that the printing is legible and large. If there are candidates with unusual names, please go over the names with the bishop before the liturgy begins. **In addition to the cards**, the candidate or sponsor may call out the candidate's name.

14. **Lavabo bowl**. Because the bishop will be laying hands on numerous heads, and perhaps using oil of chrism at baptism, please provide a lavabo bowl and towel for use at the offertory.

15. **Vestments**. Unless requested otherwise, the bishop will wear chasuble and mitre. While the Bishop would prefer to wear the vestments of the house if available, she can also bring her own vestments. If requested, she can also wear rochet and chimere. Please let the secretary know of the preferred arrangements when scheduling.
16. **Announcements**. It is appropriate for the clergy in charge to give the announcements and welcome the bishop. If family or others accompany the bishop, the welcome should include them as well. Please include the following announcement either in the bulletin or orally at the time of the offertory:

The loose offering at this service is designated for the Bishop's Discretionary Fund, which is used for a variety of needs not otherwise provided for in the diocesan budget. These needs generally are charitable, educational, or medical and distributed for specific individual needs involving both clergy and laity.

D. **Miscellaneous**.

1. **Certificates**. Certificates for Confirmation, Reception, and joint Baptism & Confirmation, to be signed by the bishop at the service, are available from the bishop's office, and should be requested **two weeks in advance** to be mailed. If you are unsure about the number, order a few extra and return any extra certificates with your confirmation reporting form.
2. **Prayer books**. If those being confirmed are given prayer books and it is desired that the bishop sign them, please collect them so that they can be signed before the service.
3. **Expenses**. The expenses of the bishop for normal annual visitation are paid by the Diocese, except when a visiting bishop is brought in at the invitation of the parish and with the consent of the diocesan bishop. The loose offering goes to the diocesan Bishop's Discretionary Fund.
4. **List of names**. Within ten days after a visitation, a list of the full names of those confirmed and/or received should be sent to the bishop's office. Please use the confirmation reporting form sent with confirmation and reception cards.
5. **Loose offering**. Within ten days after a visitation, a check representing the loose offering should be sent to the bishop's office. The check should be made out: **Diocese of Southern Virginia**. The memo line should read: **Bishop's Discretionary Fund**. If you have a visiting bishop, the agenda line should read: Bishop's Discretionary Fund.
6. **Parking**. If parking is limited, and since the bishop is carrying vestments, books, and crozier, it would be helpful if you would **reserve a parking place** for the bishop near the church and have someone available to help the bishop. Please indicate that on the green return form included with these guidelines.
7. **Alcohol at Receptions/Meals**. While the Bishop appreciates the offering of alcohol (to gladden the heart, Psalm 104:14-15), she will also be pleased to partake of equally attractive non-alcoholic beverages.