



The Episcopal Diocese of Georgia

The office of the Right Reverend Scott Anson Benhase, Bishop of Georgia

Bishop's Customary for Visitations Revised March 2017

INTRODUCTION

The regular Pastoral Visitation of all parishes in 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 parish. All other aspects of the Visitation (baptisms, confirmations, receptions, and reaffirmations) are auxiliary and must never be allowed to overshadow this central purpose.

SCHEDULING

The canons mandate the Bishop's Visitation within a 36-month period. In practice, my schedule allows me to visit once in every 12-15 months. I schedule Pastoral Visitations 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, groundbreakings, etc.;
- Pastoral needs of the parish;
- The celebration of a patronal feast or other significant event in the parish's life;

Parishes may request a specific day or season for my Visitation, but I will make the final scheduling decisions. The norm is that I will not return to a parish for a regular Visitation until all other parishes have been visited.

I plan my Visitation schedule to cover the upcoming year (September – June), and I try to make it available in June prior to the year in question. 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. Such changes will be rare.

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 needed. If it is possible to merge the liturgies into one, then that is my preference. This also would provide more time to be flexible with adult forums, teaching a class, and meeting with the Vestry, etc.

I am happy to meet with any configuration of parishioners before or after the service(s). I can lead 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 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 sometime on the day of visitation.

THE LITURGY OF THE DAY

All my visitations will be celebrations of the Holy Eucharist.

When there are no baptisms, confirmations, receptions, or reaffirmations, the liturgy on the day of my visitation should include the Renewal of Baptismal Vows (BCP, p. 292). This should be substituted for the Nicene Creed at all services.

The Propers of the Day are used, even when initiation rites 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.

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 happy to spend time with children in other contexts.

To emphasize my pastoral relationship, I will wear the stole & chasuble of the parish. I will bring a plain alb and crozier. If you wish me to wear my miter, please make this clearly known on the Visitation Form.

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 crozier when we are not in procession;
- Assisting with baptisms

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 and 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 Fund for support of emergencies and non-budgeted ministries that arise during 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 candidate(s), examination, and the baptismal covenant will be conducted from the chancel steps (or the equivalent) with the candidates standing where they have been seated;

- After the prayers for the candidate(s), we process to the font in the following manner: the deacon, the bishop, assisting priest(s), then the baptismal candidate(s) and sponsor(s);
- The bishop will bless the water and say the thanksgiving over the water; The priest will baptize and seal infants/small children. I will baptize and seal teenagers 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 chrim is required. Otherwise, I will assume an adequate supply. Please make the chrim 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

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 about this. I will preside from there until we go to the altar for the Liturgy of the Holy Communion. My crozier can be lain on the altar. Please provide a small table next to my chair. Before the Offertory, the Chair and table can be moved to its regular location.

The Opening Sentences (by season) with 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 that Sunday's Collect or, if it is a Feast Day, the collect appointed.

The Lessons

If a hymn or anthem is sung before the Gospel, 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 in the place where they have been seated. They should not come forward and "line up." 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. The Intercessor should not direct people to the pages in the BCP for these prayers. He/she should simply say something like: "Please respond to each petition with: 'Lord, Hear our Prayer'." If there are 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 simple in application:

- Confirmation is for people who have received Trinitarian baptism, but who have never made a public, mature commitment to the Christian faith. 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 public, mature commitment in another Christian church.*
- 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 forward from where they have been standing in an organic way. Please have them wear 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.

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 do not have preferences for service music during the Great Thanksgiving, but I prefer we not use S130.

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. Local customs, however, should never over rule the canons of the Church or the rubrics of the Book of Common Prayer.

+ Scott
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