

Bishop's Customary for Pastoral Visitations Episcopal Diocese of East Tennessee

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. The bishop's visitation ought not to be unusual no matter how infrequent. 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 should not overshadow those central purposes.

Although confirmations, receptions, and reaffirmations will continue to take place during visitations, these rites are not the principal reasons for the bishop's pastoral visit. The availability of persons for confirmations or reception need not play any part in the scheduling of the visit. A visit is a primary way for me to live out the call to be "apostle, chief priest, and pastor of [the] diocese."

If a visit does not include any baptisms, confirmations or receptions, I would still request that we make use of the Renewal of Baptismal Vows at all services. This should be substituted for the Nicene Creed at all services, even those that are Rite 1.

I am open to attending all morning services during my visit. I would prefer to encounter your parish community as it truly is. So, if there are two or three morning liturgies, I would prefer to be present for all of them.

If there are candidates for confirmation or reception, I would like to have a time to meet with them before the service. I would prefer that you handle the mechanics of preparing them for how the liturgy will unfold and include them in it. For my time with them, I would prefer to have time to hear their story and give further pastoral direction on how they can go deeper in keeping the promises they are about to make.

When we are celebrating Confirmation/Reception/Baptism, please have the name each candidate goes by (e.g. Bill, Beth, Janie, Buster), as that is the name I will use, on a nametag (to be worn so I can clearly read it) in large, legible letters that are easily read. You and/or sponsor will present them by their full name, and I will use only the name they prefer.

I am also open to addressing members in an education or Church School hour. Be in touch with me beforehand so we can determine what topics or subjects would be helpful in your parish context.

I will plan to stay for any reception or lunch time after the morning liturgies. While I am open to meeting with the Vestry during my pastoral visit, I have discovered that such meetings are often rushed or less than satisfactory. I am very open to scheduling some other time to meet with your Vestry. Be in touch with Laura Nichols regarding scheduling another meeting.

Also, as my time permits, I would welcome the chance to visit a homebound parishioner with you while I am in your parish. Please let me know in advance if you have arranged for me to visit someone in hospital or homebound with you. My preference is that the visit would include taking a communion kit with us for the visit.

The lessons for the day from the Revised Common Lectionary should be used. If it is your patronal feast day and you wish to use those propers, please be certain to make me aware of that well in advance of the day. Normally, the liturgical color will be that of the day.

When presenting candidates for Confirmation, Reception, or Reaffirmation, my preference is that all candidates be presented at once. Then, I will ask the two questions related to renouncing of evil and renewing a commitment to Jesus Christ to the entire group, with their response to these questions being in unison.

I prefer to stand for confirming, receiving and reaffirmation. Candidates will still be invited to kneel for the laying on of hands.

During the time for announcements, I am fine with being greeted, but please do not introduce me as a guest to the parish. My presence with you is intended to represent the whole church to one part and one part to the whole. So, no us and them—only us.

I will normally wear the vestments of the parish. I will bring a plain alb, mitre, and pastoral staff. I will wear the chasuble for the entire liturgy.

The Undesignated Offering on the day of the visitation will be set aside for the Bishop's Discretionary Fund. Please make checks payable to The Bishop's Discretionary Fund.

Finally, make good use of me during the visitation. While my schedule is full as bishop, I do not ever want to send the message to parishes that I need to be rushing off to some other important matter or event. As much as possible, I intend to keep visitation days set aside completely for the parish being visited that day. I want to be present to the parish being visited.

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