

Bishop's Customary
The Diocese of Oregon
Easter 2011

Dear Friends in Christ:

Liturgy is the work of the people of God in worship. It is our common joy to share together the sacraments of the New Covenant and to preach God's word. Thus, an Episcopal Visitation is formed and shaped by our celebration of Holy Eucharist, along with other sacramental acts such as baptism, confirmation, reception, reaffirmation and other actions specific to congregational life. Also central to our time together is a substantive conversation on mission and ministry. How this conversation takes place will be discussed as we plan the event. In addition to these key elements, I look forward to opportunities for fellowship with the entire congregation. Please let me know of special celebrations to be acknowledged and of particular issues and concerns which might need attention.

This customary covers the normal activities of Bishop and congregation during an official Episcopal Visit as well as discussing a number of other related issues. It is meant to be a guide for our time together and to let you know my expectations. As such, it is not prescriptive but descriptive and can be adapted as local situations demand. Please let me know of problems that arise for you in relation to this guide.

Scheduling visitations:

The diocese consists of 74 distinct worship communities and, as such, it is not possible for me to visit every congregation yearly on a Sunday morning. However, I believe strongly that every congregation deserves to have a substantive conversation with the diocesan office each year. This will be accomplished by having two different types of visits. Visits by the Diocesan Bishop will be termed "Episcopal Visitations" and will include conversations with congregational leaders and clergy on mission and ministry as well as the normal liturgical rites associated with a Bishop's visit. Visits by the Canon for Congregational Development and Staff, Neysa Ellgren, will be termed "Congregational Visitations" and will include conversations with congregational leadership and clergy in mission and ministry but will not include the special rites associated with an Episcopal Visitation. The Bishop will normally preach and celebrate at Episcopal Visits. The Canon will either preach or celebrate but the Canon will not normally perform both of these acts.

Liturgy:

As a general rule our worship together should come from the *Book of Common Prayer* and/or *Enriching Our Worship*. If you desire to use something else during an Episcopal Visitation, this needs to be discussed with me first.

- The text for Sunday usage is the Revised Common Lectionary. Please see that I receive a copy of the texts to be used (citation alone is enough) at least one week in advance.
- The color of the day for baptism is white, for confirmation it is red, and use white when both sacraments are to be used in a single service. If neither of these acts is a part of the service, use the color of the season.

- I am happy to sing parts of the service but I have no ability to sight read so I appreciate knowing music specific to the congregation in advance.
- Always include the Renewal of Baptismal Vows in place of the Nicene Creed even when there are no baptisms, confirmations, receptions or reaffirmations.
- I will normally preside from the space in which the priest presides. I prefer to sit for confirmations and do appreciate a chair being provided for this prior to the service.
- I have noticed that several congregations are in the habit of closing off the altar area at the communion rail prior to the beginning of the Eucharistic Prayer. Please do not do this. It creates a barrier and separation between the sacred ministers and the people of God at a critical point in the service. It is fine to “close the gates” for communion.
- A Deacon is to be assigned as my Chaplain when possible. If a congregation is without a Deacon a lay minister is the next appropriate chaplain. Please note: Beth Mallon, the diocesan Archdeacon, is available to discuss the possibility of a local area Deacon serving at your church on the Sunday of my visitation. It might serve as a way to enter into a congregational discussion of the diaconate.

Additional Considerations:

- I enjoy meeting with those who are being baptized, confirmed, received and reaffirmed prior to the service. I prefer to meet with them in a place set apart—when practical—and to do so for about twenty minutes. I then need ten minutes to get ready for the liturgy. I assume candidates will have been prepared for their part in the service leaving us space to talk more generally about their journey.
- Family members are welcome to participate in confirmations and receptions by coming forward and placing their hands on the candidate’s shoulders while I lay hands on their head. This is a prayerful reminder of the entire congregation’s part in these actions.
- I view oil as an important sign of God’s abundant love and grace. It is an inclusive gesture reminding us all of our baptisms. Please see that a small bowl or shell is available for my use when baptisms, confirmations, receptions and reaffirmations are to occur.
- Signed blank certificates for baptism, confirmation and reception can be obtained from the diocesan office in advance. Please give us enough notice to allow for mailing if necessary.
- I will sign the Sunday register and may review others. Please have them available.
- Bishop’s Discretionary Fund envelopes are available from the diocesan office. By canon, these funds assist seminarians and other emergency needs. I appreciate your attention to this detail and can assure you of the deep gratitude felt by those who receive the assistance.

On Confirmations, Receptions and Reaffirmations:

Sometimes there are questions of who should be confirmed, who should be received, and who should be reaffirmed. This is actually not as complicated as it might seem or as it once was. 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 for children who were baptized in the Episcopal Church or who came to this church with their families before making a “mature commitment.”
- Confirmation is also appropriate for those of any age who are making a mature commitment for the first time.
- Reception is for those who have previously made a mature commitment in any other Christian church, regardless of the pedigree of the minister. 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.

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.

Meeting with Vestry/BAC:

I desire to include in my time with you a one-hour conversation on mission and ministry. This can be scheduled prior to the Sunday service or it can be a part of our Sunday schedule. Local option and my schedule dictate what will work best.

During my time with you I would like to engage the following questions:

1. What is the mission of the congregation? To each other and the surrounding community, what are signs of it?
2. What is your identity as a faith community? What is unique about you? How are you developing that identity?
3. What are your challenges? What gets in your way of Living the Mission?
4. What would you like to ask me or want me to know so that the diocese can be of assistance in supporting your mission and ministry?

I feel truly blessed to be among you in the mission of God and I look forward to being with you in ministry in the years ahead.

Blessings,

The Rt. Rev. Michael J. Hanley