



# Customary for Episcopal Visitations

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## The Rt Rev Dr Douglas E. Sparks

### INTRODUCTION

The round of pastoral visits to the faith communities in the Diocese of Northern Indiana is one of my chief responsibilities as your bishop. Visitations are also one of the great joys of the episcopate. For me to preach the word and to preside at the table and the font is not an extraordinary ministry. It is, in fact, the usual thing for a bishop to do, even when a parish experiences these Episcopal acts once every fifteen to eighteen months. My hope is that visitations can be relaxed in tone but focused in purpose. They need look nothing at all like a state occasion and, as the chief pastor of the Diocese, I prefer not to be treated as a guest. We are, all of us, guests at the table where Jesus himself is the host.

As an extension of presiding at the eucharistic table, where the faithful community discerns Christ's body, present in the sacrament (1 Cor. 11:23-33), my intent is also to spend some time discerning, with you, the body of Christ which is your congregation. As you already know, I have begun this process by meeting with those charged with leadership, your vestry, and by making myself available to all of the faithful via Open Office hours in your area. These offerings will continue.

### THE SERVICE

The Proper of the Day will be used, including all three readings and Psalm. I expect that the Revised Common Lectionary (RCL) will be in use since, as of Advent 1, 2007, it is now the lectionary for the Eucharist. Whenever there are choices among the readings, and this is especially the case in Easter season and in the Season after Pentecost, we need to agree ahead of time what will be read so that I can adequately prepare.

If you have one Sunday Eucharist, I will celebrate and preach. If you have two, the rector or priest-in-charge is welcome to celebrate the early liturgy. In that case, I'll preach and pronounce the absolution and blessing. I enjoy chanting and prefer to sing the preface, as well as the doxology of the Great Thanksgiving and the introduction to the Lord's Prayer, if that is your custom. If there is anything else for me to sing, please let me know ahead of time.

The various orders of ministry should take their respective parts in the service. The first two readings should be read by a layperson. So should the psalm, if it is not sung. A deacon or layperson should lead the prayers. A deacon, whenever present, should read the gospel, invite the confession of sin, prepare the table, and give the dismissal. If there is no deacon, then an assisting priest should read the gospel and prepare the table. I do not use a missal stand, but prefer the altar book lying flat on the altar. Per the rubrics, I will (as celebrant) invite the confession of sin and dismiss the people.

When available, a deacon will assist me in the liturgy, especially to hold the book, mitre, and pastoral staff, as needed. In the absence of a deacon, a senior acolyte or assisting priest may take these duties. I am not overly fussy about such matters, and the basic rule is that a deacon or other assistant stands ready to hold whatever I hand over!

If there are no baptisms or confirmations, the Renewal of Baptismal Vows (BCP, page 292) should be used in place of the Nicene Creed.

One of the clergy, or else a warden, should make necessary parish announcements.

Deacons and priests should join me at the table for the Eucharistic Prayer, and other ministers of communion should be close by also. Please let me know beforehand: 1) which Eucharistic Prayer to use (see Note about Eucharistic Prayers below); 2) whether to sing the preface; 3) which version of the Lord's Prayer (traditional or contemporary) is customary; and 4) if Rite I, whether to include the Prayer of Humble Access. Of course, I will be grateful to know other liturgical choices your community makes, and I will do my best to honor them.

Any liturgical expectations you have for me besides baptism, confirmation, and Eucharist – blessings of one sort or another, or a healing service, for example – I am happy to entertain, but I need to know about these ahead of time.

Providing me a service bulletin at least a week in advance will help me prepare for the liturgy more adequately. Please feel free to schedule a call should there be any specific items to discuss ahead of my visit.

Vestment colors should be white, if there are baptisms, or seasonal, if there are none.

I prefer the use of loaf bread or pita bread for the Eucharist, along with a single chalice on the table, the rubrical intent of the Prayer Book rites. One bread, one cup, one body. Also, the communion of the people should be from the elements consecrated at the Eucharist and not from the reserved sacrament. If the elements are depleted, additional bread or wine may be consecrated as needed.

## BAPTISM

Our Prayer Book names the bishop's visitation among the five occasions especially fitting for baptism, and I want to honor that norm in the congregations of this Diocese. Following the Prayer Book's shape of the rite and ancient practice, I want to preside over the rite, sharing its administration with all the orders present. So, I will ask for the presentations of those to be baptized and make the various queries of the candidates, sponsors, and congregation. I will bless the water. And I will offer the post-baptismal prayers and anoint the newly baptized. A deacon or one or more of the sponsors should lead the Prayers for the Candidate(s). A priest or deacon should administer the water rite. In this fashion, all the orders take a share.

## CONFIRMATION, RECEPTION AND REAFFIRMATION

Whenever the bishop is present, the Prayer Book provides for the ministration of baptism and confirmation in one seamless liturgy, using the rite which begins on page 299. If there are confirmations but no baptism, then the rite is the one beginning on Page 413.

Any people not yet confirmed by a bishop in historic succession are eligible for confirmation. Regarding reception, any people who have already been confirmed by a bishop in the historic success (for example, former Roman Catholics) and who are seeking to become members of the Episcopal Church are eligible. I am happy to make an exception to this, however, when communicants of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America wish to become members of the Episcopal Church. Because we are in full communion with the ELCA and our clergy are interchangeable, those persons may be either confirmed or received; the choice is theirs. Reaffirmation is appropriate for those people already confirmed or

received in the Episcopal Church and who wish to make a public reaffirmation of their commitment to Jesus Christ. This opportunity will be offered whenever any Confirmation/Reception is scheduled, or at the request of the clergy.

The primary sacramental action is the imposition of hands, and the formula used—for confirmation, reception, or reaffirmation. I will not need a central chair for this. In every event, the occasion is one of solemn reaffirmation of baptismal vows, in the presence of the bishop and the gathered community, with the bishop then imposing hands. I expect that you will use flexible and pastorally attentive good sense, especially when you must decide whether to present someone for confirmation or reception. It is acceptable to use the form for reception, as long as the candidate has made some mature profession of faith in the presence of the community, typically either believer's baptism or confirmation in some other Christian tradition. Some who have made such a profession, however, may express a strong desire for confirmation. I have no hard-and-fast rule, and a pastoral case can be made for deciding either way.

Again, the liturgical color will be that of the season, unless there are baptisms. Red is not used for confirmation, unless it is otherwise the color of the day.

Note that while the hymn *Veni Creator Spiritus* might be sung sometime during the liturgy, it is not sung at the point just before the laying on of hands.

## TEACHING

The teaching ministry of the episcopate means a great deal to me, and I am willing to teach whatever is helpful, in your setting. Teaching can be formal or informal. It can focus on a local need or diocesan life. It can be question-and-answer or simple dialogue. It can be the next unit of an ongoing series in the parish. Whatever the forum, I do love to teach.

## THE PEOPLE OF THE PARISH

The sharing of a meal or refreshments is something I enjoy, since it allows me to be with the people of the parish in a more relaxed setting. Please understand that such an event is neither required nor necessary for every visitation. But I always welcome these opportunities.

## THE BISHOP'S DISCRETIONARY FUND

It is important for the Rector or Priest to remind the congregation that the undesignated offering is for the Bishop's Discretionary Fund used for religious and charitable purposes, pastoral emergencies, and ministries that arise in the course of the year. Make checks payable to Diocese of Northern Indiana – Bishop's Discretionary Fund. Discretionary fund envelopes are available from the Diocesan office by contacting Missioner Michelle Walker. All funds collected should be mailed to the Missioner for Finance, Carol Bianchini, at the Diocesan Office (see address below).

## CERTIFICATES AND OTHER SIGNINGS

Clergy are responsible for producing or procuring certificates of baptism. The baptizing presbyter should sign as officiant and the Bishop will sign under her or his name.

Certificates for Confirmation or Reception will be provided by the Diocesan Office.

I am happy to sign any other items, such as Prayer Books or Bibles. Please have those available.

## REVIEW OF KEY INFORMATION

The Rector or Priest shall present to the Bishop all parish registers for review; a copy of the current year's parochial report; and the results of the most recent financial audit.

## A NOTE ON EUCHARISTIC PRAYERS

During my years as a parish priest, I generally used the following structure in selecting Eucharistic prayers:

- During Advent, Christmas and Epiphany seasons I welcomed the rich Incarnational nature of Eucharistic Prayer B.
- In Lent, I embraced Eucharistic Prayer C for its remembrance of God as the Holy Creator and our role in sinning against God and our neighbors.
- At the Easter season (through Pentecost), Eucharistic Prayer D represents our salvation history, has baptismal references during this time of rebirth, and is adapted from the Prayer of St. Basil and a form of this prayer is used by our ecumenical partners.
- During the summer months (Pentecost through Labor Day specifically) I selected one of the three prayers from Enriching our Worship.
- From the start of the program year (post Labor Day) until Advent I preferred Eucharistic Prayer A.

This structure provides rhythm and diversity in Eucharistic offerings during the Liturgical year.

These are not hard rules about which Eucharistic Prayer to select during my visitation. Rather they are a rhythm for you to consider. Please ensure the Eucharistic Prayer is appropriate for the occasion and celebration of my visitation.



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To be returned to Diocesan Office, 117 N. Lafayette Blvd, South Bend, IN 46601 | email: [info@ednin.org](mailto:info@ednin.org)

1. Date of Visitation: \_\_\_\_\_

2. Name of Congregation/City: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Rector/Priest/Senior Warden: \_\_\_\_\_

3. Contact numbers: Church: (include area code): \_\_\_\_\_

Rector/Vicar Home: (include area code): \_\_\_\_\_

Cell (include area code): \_\_\_\_\_

4. Special Notes regarding Arrival at Church: (Directions, Constructions notes, Parking or Church entrances)

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\_\_\_\_\_

5. Schedule of the Day (generally between 8:00am and 3:00pm) Please list all scheduled activities including services, educational hours, etc and note either Eastern Standard Time (EST) or Central Standard Time (CST).

Service or Activity	Time (EST/CST)	Notes

6. Liturgy: Please check the appropriate entry and include an approximate number of persons anticipated for the sacrament.

Time of service: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_ Holy Eucharist without baptism

\_\_\_\_ Baptism (# to be baptized \_\_\_\_)

\_\_\_\_ Confirmation (# \_\_\_\_)

\_\_\_\_ Reception (# \_\_\_\_)

\_\_\_\_ Other

Time of service: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_ Holy Eucharist without baptism

\_\_\_\_ Baptism (# to be baptized \_\_\_\_)

\_\_\_\_ Confirmation (# \_\_\_\_)

\_\_\_\_ Reception (# \_\_\_\_)

\_\_\_\_ Other

7. Other liturgical notes: *Include information on dedications, blessings, or other special liturgical aspects of the services.*

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8. Episcopal Vestments: *The Bishop will vest in chasuble and miter. The Bishop would prefer the congregation's chasuble.*

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9. Propers of the Day: *The Bishop will assume that the Revised Common Lectionary (Episcopal version) is being used unless otherwise noted below.* Where there are alternative readings allowed please specify which readings will be used for that visit.

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10. Comments or areas for discussion with the Bishop:

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