



*Diocese of Missouri*  
THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH

**BISHOP GEORGE WAYNE SMITH**

## **CUSTOMARY FOR EPISCOPAL VISITATIONS**

### **INTRODUCTION**

The round of pastoral visits to the parishes and other worshipping communities in the Diocese of Missouri 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. To this end, plan for me to meet with those charged with leadership for your common life – clergy, vestry, bishop's committee.

### **THE SERVICE**

Most of our churches have the space available to merge the usual Sunday liturgies into one. And whenever possible, that is my strong preference – one service signifying the oneness of the church, in the presence of a bishop, the sacramental person charged with guarding the church's unity. A few of our buildings simply will not hold everyone in the community at one time, and I am glad in those circumstances to accommodate local needs.

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 Sunday and Holy lectionary for the Eucharist. More to the point, the RCL is now the prayer book lectionary and not an option. 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.

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. 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, although I always want to have the opportunity for a word at this point.

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; 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 hear, but I need to know about these ahead of time.

Your providing a service bulletin at least a week in advance will help me prepare for the liturgy more adequately.

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

I always prefer the use of loaf bread or pita bread (or else the very large hosts) 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 also bless the baptismal oil (if needed) and the water. And I will offer the post-baptismal prayers and anoint the newly baptized. A deacon or layperson 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.

For its rich symbolic value, I encourage the use of chrism at baptism, and I am willing to consecrate it during my visitation. If there are baptisms, the consecration comes before the blessing of the water. If there are no baptisms, the consecration of baptismal oil comes after the post-communion prayer. The practice of making chrism available at a diocesan liturgy will continue, but I believe there is some value in blessing oil for baptism in the parish community where it will actually be used.

## CONFIRMATION

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.

The primary sacramental action is the imposition of hands, and the formula used—for confirmation, reception, or reaffirmation. 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 VESTRY OR BISHOP'S COMMITTEE

Please know that I want to meet with the circle of designated leaders, when I come for a visitation. I want to hear from you how I and my office might better support the mission and ministry God has set before you. I also want to know what that mission and ministry might be, as well as the plans you have made to accomplish it. The work of our Diocese is accomplished most of all through the life of our fifty congregations, and I want to collaborate with those charged for the local leadership in every one of them.

## THE CLERGY

I believe that supporting and encouraging congregations requires a bishop to support and encourage their ordained leadership. Thus, I hope to find time to consult with the clergy, sometime around the date of the visitation. I also want to give some of my time, as you find helpful, to your families. The day of the visitation itself may be the occasion for a leisurely meal or some other substantial time together. Alternatively, it may be preferable to arrange to visit with me in the weeks before or soon after a visitation, especially when there are several clergy in a given congregation. I ask the clergy to contact my office to make the necessary arrangements.