

Customary for the Bishop's Visitation
Diocese of El Camino Real
Advent, 2009

Dear Friends,

Now that I have made a full round of visitations, visiting most churches more than once, and having gotten to know our diocese, it seems a good time to update my customary. Visitations are a central part of my ministry with you, and I thoroughly enjoy being present in our congregations for worship as often as possible. With 50 congregations in El Camino Real, realistically I can only be present on Sundays once every 15 to 18 months; however, other opportunities for connecting with vestries, congregations and deaneries are easy to arrange. Never hesitate to ask for time with me on a day other than a Sunday. I enjoy being with you!

The customary is designed to assist clergy and parish leaders with easy planning and communication for the visitation, which is at once business as usual and a special event. I hope this helps to facilitate a meaningful and fluid worship experience for all. The celebration of the Holy Eucharist is at the heart of what will happen at a visitation, along with preaching, baptism, confirmation, reception, reaffirmation and other celebrations specific to the congregation. As well, fellowship time with the congregation and the vestry are always welcome. I anticipate that if there are specific issues that need addressing, concerns or causes for special celebrations, you will let me know these so I may more fully engage in the life of the congregation.

Some of what follows will be familiar, but it is good to have it all in one place. Logistical details will also be prepared with my assistant, Susan Altig, who will contact you well in advance to confirm the visitation and to begin the planning process. If you have specific dates that you would like me to visit, such as a feast day, please feel free to ask. Know we will do our best to accommodate you, but that consideration is given to making sure all our congregations are visited within the 15-18 month time period.

Some key points and personal preferences include:

Liturgy: The liturgy for our worship together, and as a general rule in our diocese, needs to follow the Book of Common Prayer or Enriching our Worship. If you wish to deviate from approved liturgies of The Episcopal Church for a visitation, or at any time, this needs to be discussed with me first. It is not that I object to some temporary changes or alterations, but I

think that liturgy and the decisions we make around it need to adhere largely to our approved texts, and should also be something we discuss as bishop and rector or vicar.

A couple of preferences on my part include as little instruction given to me during worship as possible. In other words, please inform me or my chaplain for the day of local preferences such as whether you reverence the altar, how you distribute communion, or other details that are specific to your congregation and that everyone else will know except me. I do not mind instructing the congregation; however, “huddling” frequently tends to be disruptive to prayerful worship.

Should there be no baptisms, confirmations, receptions or reaffirmations, please include the Renewal of the Baptismal Vows in place of The Nicene Creed.

Color: The color of the day for confirmations is red, white for baptism (and also if there are confirmations and baptisms together), and if neither of these celebrations are to be held, then the color of the day is appropriate.

Readings: Texts assigned for the day from The Revised Common Lectionary is the norm, unless the Rededication of a Church or other festival occasion is being celebrated. Please be sure to let me know well in advance if we are not using the RCL. I do not prep sermons on Saturday night!

Singing: I am more than happy to sing; preferring simple tone and time to prepare. Please be sure to let me know in advance and which parts of the liturgy will be sung.

Chaplain: My preference is to have James Booth or Robert Seifert accompany me as my chaplain. They are well-tuned to my preferences and assist me in smooth presiding of the liturgy. If there is a deacon in the parish, it works well if they serve as deacon of the table, being free of my need for a chaplain. As well, James, Robert and I always appreciate when they are introduced to the congregation.

Discretionary Envelopes: It is the custom of this diocese when the bishop visits to provide envelopes for contributions to the Bishop’s Discretionary Fund. When working on details with Susan, please let her know if you need them provided. I am always deeply grateful for the generosity of our congregations, and am thankful when you tend carefully to this detail. Others, clergy among them, are thankful too!

Meeting with candidates: I enjoy doing this for about 20 or so minutes, allowing me about 15 minutes to vest and prepare for worship. I anticipate that candidates are liturgically prepared, and enjoy speaking with them about their journey and what brings them to this day. In some

cases, meeting with candidates during a preparation session in the week beforehand is preferable.

Participation of Family and Sponsors: It is a local decision as to whether candidates sit together or with their families. They are more than welcome to join the candidate, placing their hands on their shoulders while I lay hands on their head. This is a gesture of the prayerful participation of the whole community as we ask for the Spirit to confirm, strengthen, defend, and continue to be at work in the candidate.

Signing Prayer Books and certificates: Depending on the number of candidates, please factor the need for this when determining my arrival time.

Checking the Books: I will want to review and sign the church registers. Please allow time for this, and have them set aside for me.

I use oil – I love oil – for confirmation, reception and reaffirmation – and just about any other time I can manage it! It offers a reminder to people of their baptism, it carries with it a symbol of God's abundant outpouring of love, is a sign of inclusion and is a gesture that is deeply meaningful to people. I prefer to have oil in a bowl; this is a detail that may be arranged with the chaplain for the day. I also lay hands. It has been customary to do this seated in the chair, placed in the center in front of the altar. It seems kneeling is also meaningful to people; however, standing, in a different way, may be as well. I am happy to do either, and in fact, it might be an interesting point of reflection in your preparation classes.

A few comments on Confirmation, Reception and Reaffirmation:

Sometimes there are questions of who should be confirmed, who should be received, and who should be reaffirmed. 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:

Canon 17 states:

“All persons who have received the Sacrament of Holy Baptism with water in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, whether in this Church or in another Christian Church, and whose Baptisms have been duly recorded in this Church, are members thereof.

It is expected that all adult members of this Church, after appropriate instruction, will have made a mature public affirmation of their faith and commitment to the responsibilities of their Baptism and will have been confirmed or received by the laying on of hands by a Bishop of this Church or by

a Bishop of a Church in communion with this Church. Those who have previously made a mature public commitment in another Church may be received by the laying on of hands by a Bishop of this Church, rather than confirmed.

Any person who is baptized in this Church as an adult and receives the laying on of hands by the Bishop at Baptism is to be considered, for the purpose of this and all other Canons, as both baptized and confirmed; also any person who is baptized in this Church as an adult and at some time after the Baptism receives the laying on of hands by the Bishop in Reaffirmation of Baptismal Vows is to be considered, for the purpose of this and all other Canons, as both baptized and confirmed.”

To help clarify, 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.

I hope these notes are helpful to you. Please do not hesitate to contact me or Susan should there be questions regarding the content of this customary or your scheduled visitation.

You are a blessing to me, as I pray I am to you. In our worship and ministry together, may we glorify God!

+Mary