

# VISITATION CUSTOMARY FOR THE EPISCOPAL DIOCESE OF VIRGINIA



*Revised April 2024*

## Episcopal Visitations

Visitations are a joyful and vital component of our common life as a Diocese. They offer a unique opportunity for a congregation or community to focus on its mission and ministry while placing that mission and ministry within, and strengthening its connections to, the wider Body of Christ.

Currently, parishes should expect to receive a visitation every 12-24 months. The schedule for visitations is posted and kept updated on the Diocesan website: [www.episcopalvirginia.org](http://www.episcopalvirginia.org).

The following guidelines are meant to offer support to host congregations/communities so that preparations can be made to ensure that our time together is rich with fellowship and worship.

### *Pre-visit Preparation*

In order to assist your preparation, please review and work through the *Visitation Checklist* (Appendix B). This and other relevant forms can be found in the Appendix and on the Diocese of Virginia website.

When announcing the visitation, please consider this an opportunity to teach your congregation/community about the Bishop's Office and Staff. Invite your congregation to explore the diocesan website ([episcopalvirginia.org](http://episcopalvirginia.org)). Our time together will be enhanced by exposure to the purpose of diocesan ministry and its many resources and ministries.

### *Liturgical Guidelines*

Ideally, the visitation will be rooted in Sunday worship. Please note that Sunday visitations are generally limited to one service between 9am and 3pm. The visiting bishop may be accompanied by a chaplain of their choosing.

Different bishops have distinct liturgical preferences and presences, and, where possible, these are outlined below, along with other necessary information.

- Liturgical texts authorized by the Episcopal Church should be used in the service during the visit.
- The Propers of the Day are used for Sunday visits, unless a Major or Patronal Feast is appropriate, except under extraordinary circumstances and with the consent of the Bishop.
- The Revised Common Lectionary dictates the readings for the day.
- Bulletins should be sent to the visiting bishop at least two weeks prior to the visit and should clearly indicate which lessons will be read during the service.
- Altar hangings and vestments should be coordinated with the visiting bishop.
  - The bishop will bring his/her/their own vestments.
- Many bishops prefer to officiate from a chair placed west (liturgically) of the altar.
- The bishop's visitation always includes the Holy Eucharist with the bishop as celebrant and preacher (unless discussed and approved in advance).
- A lavabo bowl and towel should be made available; a pall for the chalice should be used during the Eucharist.
- A lapel microphone is preferred.
- A parish forum is highly encouraged after the service.
  - For Bishop Stevenson's visitations:
    - Eucharistic Prayer I, A, B, or D should be used. Authorized inclusive / expansive language versions of any of these Prayers may be used as well. If a different Eucharistic Prayer is desired, please make that request at least four weeks prior to the visitation so that a conversation with the bishop may be scheduled.
  - For Bishop Harris' visitations:
    - Any liturgical texts authorized by the Episcopal Church may be used, including the inclusive language Rite II text authorized in 2018 if that is the custom of the congregation/community.
    - A 16-18 pt font version of the liturgy for her use should be provided.
    - If chanting is involved, the fully printed chant setting should be provided at least one week in advance.
- Sacramental rites happen within the context of the Eucharist. When there are no sacramental rites, the service should include the Renewal of Baptismal Vows (BCP, p. 292) in place of the Nicene Creed.
- For Baptism
  - The bishop, when present, is the celebrant; and is expected to preach the Word and preside at Baptism and the Eucharist. The priest of the parish or

community may do the actual Baptism, if requested for pastoral reasons; otherwise, the bishop performs the actual Baptism. The bishop officiates at the Presentation and Examination of Candidates; says the Thanksgiving over the Water (even if the priest of the parish performs the Baptism), consecrates the Chrism, where applicable, reads the prayer, and officiates at what follows.

- Where the baptized person is an adult, the bishop will confirm them immediately after Baptism.
- For Confirmation, Receptions, and Reaffirmations
  - For both Bishop Stevenson and Bishop Harris, Confirmands, etc., kneel before the bishop who remains seated. The bishop's chair will need to be positioned accordingly. If a Confirmand is unable to kneel, or prefers for personal reasons not to kneel, they may remain standing and the bishop will stand for the laying on of hands.
  - Posture for the candidates when other bishops are presiding should be coordinated with that particular bishop.
    - Bishop Stevenson:
      - The first prayer for Confirmation is used: "Strengthen, O Lord, your servant *N.* with your Holy Spirit..."
    - Bishop Harris:
      - The second prayer for Confirmation is used: "Defend, O Lord, your servant *N.* with your heavenly grace..."
- Please note that the use of "Alleluia" for the dismissal is not appropriate outside of Eastertide.

Where two or more parishes/communities come together for a visitation, they are encouraged to work together to plan and staff the worship service.

Please see *Sample Orders of Service* (Appendix G) for assistance in planning and more details.

### *Post-Service*

Please review the *Visitation Checklist* (Appendix B) for instructions on submitting the necessary forms and Bishop's Discretionary Fund loose plate offerings.

## Appendix B | Diocese of Virginia Visitation Checklist

**As soon as possible, but no later than 4 weeks prior to visitation:**

- Return the completed [Episcopal Visitation Information Form \(Appendix C\)](#) and the [Expected Rights to Be Performed During Episcopal Visitation Form \(Appendix D\)](#) to the Bishop's Office. These forms must be in hand prior to the call between the bishop and congregational representative.
  - Include several photos of the church interior - specifically include a shot of the altar area, taken from far enough back to see the entire liturgical space.
  - Also include directions to the parking space that will be reserved for the bishop.
- Contact Anita Lisk in the Bishop's Office ([alisk@episcopalvirginia.org](mailto:alisk@episcopalvirginia.org)) to schedule a phone or Zoom call with your visiting bishop (typically scheduled during the week prior to your visitation).
  - Just prior to the call, please send a copy of your most recent newsletter or other general parish communication to help update the visiting bishop.
- If sacramental rites will be included in the service, you will be sent in advance the number of appropriate certificates requested or an electronic template to create certificates (adult Baptism/Confirmation/Reception/Reaffirmation). Note that infant/child Baptism and godparent certificates should come from the parish/community and not the Bishop's Office.
  - Refer to the *Guidelines for the Rites of Initiation* (Appendix E) for assistance in determining the appropriate sacramental rite or contact the Bishop's Office.

**Two weeks prior to visitation:**

- Prepare the Order of Service and send it to the Bishop's Office for approval. The lessons that will be read and preached from should be clearly indicated.

**Date of visitation:**

- Please provide a marked parking space for the bishop. (Directions to the space should have been sent to the Bishop's Office previously.)
- Please appoint someone to greet the bishop (and chaplain) when he/she/they arrive and to assist with any needs he/she/they may have (carrying bags from the car, navigating the church, etc.).

- Have the Parish Registers, including the Service Register, available for review and be prepared “to give the Bishop information on the state of the congregation, spiritual and temporal” as the Canons require.
- Remind the congregation that the loose offering received is to be designated for the Bishop’s Discretionary Fund.
- Appoint someone to take photos at events during the visit and after the service of the bishop with clergy and/or the newly baptized/confirmands/etc. and send to Nancy Chafin at [nchafin@episcopalvirginia.org](mailto:nchafin@episcopalvirginia.org) within 24 hours. These photos will be used on social media, so parental permission should be obtained for any youth photographed.

**Within two weeks after the visitation:**

- Return the [Rites Performed During Episcopal Visit Form \(Appendix F\)](#) to the Bishop’s Office even if no Rites were performed.
- Send a check for the loose offerings payable to the Diocese of Virginia with a note on the check specifying the name of the bishop who visited and the date of the visitation and send it to the address below. (Please note that travel expenses for visiting bishops are paid by the Diocese.)

**Contact for questions/further information and return forms to:**

Anita Lisk, Executive Assistant to the Bishops  
[alisk@episcopalvirginia.org](mailto:alisk@episcopalvirginia.org) | 804-643-8451 ext. 1048 | 800-  
 DIOCESE The Episcopal Diocese of Virginia  
 110 W. Franklin Street  
 Richmond, Virginia 23220

## Appendix C | Episcopal Visitation Information Form

Please complete and return this form no later than 4 weeks prior to visitation. You may print and (email) [alisk@episcopalvirginia.org](mailto:alisk@episcopalvirginia.org) or (mail) this form to 110 W. Franklin St., Richmond, VA 23220. For electronic submission of this form, [click here](#).

Bishop \_\_\_\_\_ will be visiting \_\_\_\_\_  
visiting bishop church name

in \_\_\_\_\_ on \_\_\_\_\_.  
location date

Service time: \_\_\_\_\_ Bishop's requested time of arrival: \_\_\_\_\_

### Contact Information

Rector/Vicar/PIC/Lay Pastoral Leader: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_ Cell: \_\_\_\_\_ Office: \_\_\_\_\_

Church street address (including zip code):  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Include helpful driving directions if necessary:  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Mailing address (if different):  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Parish office contact and information:  
\_\_\_\_\_

Please list the names and titles of all clergy serving (and their partners, if applicable), as well as the names and contact information (email/phone number) of the Sr. and Jr. Warden and Treasurer  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## Worship Service

Service Time\*: \_\_\_\_\_ Color of the Day: \_\_\_\_\_

Holy Eucharist: \_\_\_\_\_ Rite I \_\_\_\_\_ Rite II    Bishop to Chant Liturgy?\* Yes/No

RCL Readings (the Revised Common Lectionary is the required lectionary for usage)

Hebrew Scriptures: \_\_\_\_\_ Psalm: \_\_\_\_\_

Epistle: \_\_\_\_\_ Gospel: \_\_\_\_\_

Will these lessons be read at all the services? Yes/No If No, explain:

\_\_\_\_\_

Are children present during any or all of the worship service: Yes/No

Please describe their routine and involvement:

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Will the service include Baptism, Confirmation, Reception, or Reaffirmation of Baptismal Vows? Yes/No

*Approximate numbers: (The host congregation will provide baptismal certificates for infants and children. All other certificates will be mailed in advance based upon the provided approximate numbers.)*

Baptismal Candidates:	_____	_____	_____
	infants	children	adults
Candidates for:	_____	_____	_____
	confirmation	reception	reaffirmation

NOTE: Please fully complete the *Rites Performed During Episcopal Visit* information sheet (Appendix E) and return it to the Bishop's Office with this form. If there are receptions, pay special attention that all requested information is provided.

\*Please note that Sunday visitations are generally limited to a single service between 9am and 3pm. Requests for multiple service times need to be made no later than 1 month prior to the visitation.

\*Please note that chanting the liturgy is within the discretion of the visiting bishop.



## **Proposed Schedule for the Bishop’s Time with the Congregation/Community**

Include 30-60 minutes before the service for the bishop to meet with candidates and their sponsors and parents/caregivers (if applicable), sign certificates/prayers books (if applicable), and review the parish registers. Also note other activities, before or after the service, to which you would like to invite the bishop (e.g., vestry meeting, search committee meeting, reception/luncheon, Sunday school visit, adult education time, special event, etc.). Bishops often have more time after the service than prior, therefore post-service options are encouraged. Bishop Stevenson particularly encourages a parish forum after the service.

Proposed schedule/activities:

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### **What Else?**

For what is the congregation/community known in the surrounding community?

What particular joys and challenges has the congregation/community experienced in the past year?

If sacramental rites are to be performed, please share what preparation the candidates and any parents/caregivers/godparents/sponsors have undergone.

Is there anything else that would be helpful for the bishop to know before the visit?

Name & Email: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

# Appendix D | Expected Rites to Be Performed During Episcopal Visitation

Please complete this form and return it (along with the *Episcopal Visitation Information Form*) no later than 4 weeks prior to the visitation. You may print and (email) [alisk@episcopalvirginia.org](mailto:alisk@episcopalvirginia.org) or (mail) this form to 110 W. Franklin St., Richmond, VA 23220. For electronic submission of this form, [click here](#). Our *Guidelines for the Rites of Initiation* may serve as a guide (Appendix E).

*If multiple congregations/communities are participating, all expected rites to be performed should be listed here by the host parish on behalf of all participants.*

Bishop \_\_\_\_\_ will be visiting \_\_\_\_\_  
visiting bishop church name

in \_\_\_\_\_ on \_\_\_\_\_  
location date

To be Baptized:

Name	Age	Current Congregation/Community

To be Confirmed:

Name	Age	Church of Baptism	Current Congregation/Community

To be Received:

Name	Age	Previous Denomination	Current Congregation/Community

Reaffirmation:

Name	Age	Church of Baptism/Confirmation	Current Congregation/Community

## Appendix E | Guidelines for the Rites of Initiation

### Sequence and Interrelationship

“Holy Baptism is full initiation by water and the Holy Spirit into Christ’s body the Church” (Book of Common Prayer, p. 298), every baptized person is welcome to receive Holy Communion. The normal sequence, therefore, in the administration of the Initiatory Rites is Holy Baptism, Holy Communion, and Confirmation.

While Baptism is the rite that welcomes the initiate into Communion with God in Christ, Confirmation is the means whereby the mature Christian reaffirms his/her/their Baptismal Vows, makes a personal commitment to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, and covenants to share actively in the Church's mission. This mission is clearly defined in the biblical imperative, “Go into all the world and preach the Gospel to the whole creation” (Mark 16:15).

### Holy Baptism

The prerequisites for Holy Baptism are as follows:

For an infant: the expressed desire of the parent(s) or guardian(s).

For a pre-adolescent child: his/her/their own expressed desire, along with the consent of the parent(s) or guardian(s).

For an adolescent young person or adult: his/her/their own expressed desire.

An appropriate program of catechetical instruction before the administration of Holy Baptism is appropriate, and the newly baptized, where applicable, should be encouraged to participate fully in the regular Christian education program of the Church following the Baptism.

#### *Discipline for the Administration of Holy Baptism*

The Episcopal Church recognizes the universality of Christian baptism regardless of the method of administration, the age of the recipient, or the denomination of the officiant, provided that it be administered with water in the Name of the Trinity. If these basic requirements have been met, the rite may not be repeated since re-baptism calls into question the certainty of God's promise and also indicates a lack of respect for other denominations within the Body of Christ.

Since advance preparation is of primary importance, clergy, as a matter of pastoral judgement, may deny or defer the Sacrament of Holy Baptism in the case of any who will not consent to counseling and instruction, who have no intent of entering into the full life of the worshipping community, or who, for valid reasons, have previously been refused the rite by another member of the clergy.

Since the baptismal rite is intended to be administered within the Eucharist during a principal service of worship in the presence of the congregation where the candidate will become a participating member, private Baptism, whether at church or at home, is strongly discouraged except where there are extenuating circumstances. We encourage Baptism in the congregation where the person and/or family will be active. Sensitive pastoral insight will be required in circumstances where, for legitimate reason, the Baptism may take place in a congregation other than the local community, and the clergy involved should not overlook this opportunity to convey the true meaning of Baptism as initiation not only into the universal church, but also into a local community of worshipping and witnessing Christians.

As indicated in the Book of Common Prayer (p. 312), it is appropriate that whenever possible Holy Baptism be administered on the following days:

the Bishop's visitation, except when it occurs during Lent  
the Day of Pentecost  
All Saints' Day or the Sunday after All Saints' Day  
the Feast of the Baptism of our Lord  
Easter Vigil (an occasion especially suited for the Baptism of adults)

In accordance with the Book of Common Prayer, the bishop, when present, is the celebrant; and is expected to preach the Word and preside at Baptism and the Eucharist. The priest of the parish or community may do the actual Baptism, if requested for pastoral reasons; otherwise, the bishop performs the actual Baptism. The bishop officiates at the Presentation and Examination of Candidates; says the Thanksgiving over the Water (even if the priest of the parish performs the Baptism), consecrates the Chrism, where applicable, reads the prayer, and officiates at what follows.

## **Reception of Holy Communion for Children and Youth**

Baptized children may receive Holy Communion when accompanied by a parent, caregiver, or sponsor able to assist the child in discernment of the Lord's presence in a manner appropriate to the child.

Since there is no determinant age for admission to the Holy Communion, the decision in each situation must best be reached by parents/caregivers and child(ren) in consultation with the parish clergy. Care should be taken not to establish a set or minimum age, however, lest admission to the Lord's Table become merely "the thing to do," a rite of passage for youth of a certain age.

For the following reasons, it is the policy of the Diocese of Virginia to permit the admission of baptized young people to the Holy Communion for the following reasons:

The Holy Communion is God's "free gift" whose reception is not dependent upon one's intellectual understanding, but rather on the discernment of faith within the community of faith. That discernment takes different forms appropriate to a person's age.

Some parents are desirous that their children at an early age share fully in the Eucharistic fellowship.

Regular reception of the Holy Communion will enhance the younger child's growing awareness of his/her/their participation in the Christian community and of the abundance of God's nourishing love.

Letters of transfer should clearly indicate when baptized persons, not confirmed, have been accustomed to receiving the Holy Communion. By the same token, baptized children who have been properly admitted to the Holy Communion elsewhere are entitled to receive the sacrament in any Episcopal Church in the Diocese of Virginia.

## **Confirmation, Reception, and Reaffirmation of Baptismal Vows**

In accordance with the Book of Common Prayer, there are three Episcopal rites which are properly designated as the "Laying on of Hands."

In the bishop, by virtue of their office, resides the fullness of ministry, responsibility and authority committed by Christ to his Church. The bishop, is, therefore, the guardian of truth, custodian of the sacraments, and symbol of unity. Since the bishop



acts for the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church, it is proper that candidates presented for Confirmation, Reception, and Reaffirmation receive the Episcopal laying on of hands.

Only those persons who have been baptized with water in the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit may be presented for Confirmation, Reception, and Reaffirmation. The minister preparing candidates for the laying on of hands is responsible for ascertaining that each of them has been properly baptized.

The minister or catechist in charge of instructing candidates for the laying on of hands is expected to clarify the three specific purposes of Confirmation, Reception, and Reaffirmation and to determine which of these rites would be most appropriate for each person desiring to be presented to the bishop.

It is the custom in the Diocese of Virginia to use the Episcopal laying on of hands for all three rites of Confirmation, Reception, and Reaffirmation.

### *Confirmation*

Confirmation is for those who wish to express a mature public affirmation of their faith, recommit themselves to the responsibilities of their Baptism, AND who fall into one of the following categories:

- were baptized as infants/children
- were baptized as adults but who were not simultaneously confirmed by a bishop and who did not receive the Episcopal laying on of hands
- were baptized and confirmed in a denomination other than:
  - another province of the Anglican Communion
  - the Orthodox Church
  - the Roman Catholic Church
  - the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
  - the Old Catholic Church
  - the Philippine Independent Church
  - the Mar Thoma Syrian Church of Malabar
  - the Moravian Church in America

The primary intent of Confirmation is to provide one the occasion, in the presence of the bishop and the gathered community, to profess Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior

and to invoke God's help through the Holy Spirit to live as a witnessing Christian in the world.

The bishop should be assured that those presented for Confirmation have demonstrated a personal understanding of the Christian faith, have been instructed in Christian doctrine and discipline, and are able to make a personal confession of their faith. It is expected, too, that candidates for Confirmation will be prepared to undertake a disciplined ministry in the mission of the Church.

### *Youth Confirmation*

In recent time, it has been customary to present young people for Confirmation at an age that has been used historically to mark the division between childhood and the taking on of the increasing responsibilities of adulthood. But our culture no longer recognizes so clear a line of division and instead allows young people to enter into an extended period of "no-longer-a-child/not-yet-an-adult," during which we see young people at different paces becoming clearer on who they are and what they want their values to be. It seems desirable to consider the end of this period in young people's lives, rather than the onset of it, as the appropriate time to offer the opportunity of making the commitment to faith represented by Confirmation.

It is, therefore, important to wait until an age when the individual may clearly express his/her/their own desire to affirm faith. It is during the years from twelve to sixteen that individuals work out their identity and it is to be hoped that their life in the community of the church during that time will have prepared them to decide to assume mature responsibility for their faith. It is also at sixteen that young adults are encouraged to take their responsibility in government of the church by voting for vestry members (Canon 11, Section 3).

Individuals do work out their identity at different paces and different ages, therefore, no guidelines will be set by the Diocese of Virginia for fixing an age for Confirmation, but clergy, catechists, and parents/caregivers are urged to consider the rationale of Confirmation being normative for those of high school years or older.

The entire Christian community needs to be made aware of their responsibility to lead each young person to make an individual and mature decision to present himself/herself/themselves to the bishop for Confirmation as directed by the Book of Common Prayer:

In the course of their Christian development, those baptized at an early age are expected, when they are ready and have been duly prepared, to make a mature public affirmation of their faith and commitment to the responsibilities of their baptism and to receive the laying on of hands by the bishop (p. 412).

### *Reception*

All Christians of the following denominations who have been baptized with water and in the name of the Trinity, who have as adults made a prior affirmation of their baptismal vows, and who wish to be received “into the fellowship of this Communion,” shall be presented to the bishop for Reception.

- another province of the Anglican Communion
- the Orthodox Church
- the Roman Catholic Church
- the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
- the Old Catholic Church
- the Philippine Independent Church
- the Mar Thoma Syrian Church of Malabar
- the Moravian Church in America

The bishop should be assured that candidates for Reception possess a personal understanding of the Christian faith, are able to make a personal confession of their faith, have been instructed in Christian doctrine and discipline, and are acquainted with the ethos, history, and background of the Anglican heritage. Each candidate should also be prepared to undertake a disciplined ministry in the mission of the Church.

Persons desiring to be received into this Church should be informed about the nature of the bishop's office as chief pastor and as symbol of unity. The catechist should also stress the importance of following the bishop's godly advice and admonitions when he/she/they speaks in accordance with the canons and discipline of the Episcopal Church.

### *Reaffirmation*

Baptized persons who have made a mature public affirmation of faith and who later desire for significant reasons to renew their commitment to God before a bishop and in the presence of the congregation, shall be presented for Reaffirmation.

The bishop should be assured that all candidates presented for Reaffirmation have a personal understanding of the Christian faith, have been instructed in basic Christian doctrine and discipline, and are able to make a personal confession of their faith. Each candidate should also be prepared to undertake a disciplined ministry in the mission of the Church.

The act of Reaffirmation implies a decisiveness quite separate from the affirmation of faith one makes during corporate worship or in one's daily resolve to follow Christ. The candidate for Reaffirmation should, therefore, be encouraged to take this step only after serious prayer and self-examination leading to an inner awareness of a renewed commitment to God.

Unlike Confirmations and Receptions, Reaffirmations should not be registered in the Parish Register.

### **Letters of Transfer/Certificates of Membership**

Letters of Transfer (“Certificates of Membership” in Canon), when issued, are to indicate a “Confirmed” status for those persons who have been presented for Reception and have received the laying on of hands.

## Appendix F | Rites Performed During Episcopal Visit

Please complete this form and return it to the Bishop's Office as soon as possible after the visitation (no later than two weeks). For electronic submission of this form, [click here](#). *If multiple congregations/communities are participating, all rites performed should be listed by the host parish on behalf of all participants.*

Members of \_\_\_\_\_ Church(es), \_\_\_\_\_, Virginia.  
 Rites Performed at \_\_\_\_\_ Church, \_\_\_\_\_, Virginia, by  
 Bishop \_\_\_\_\_ on \_\_\_\_\_, 20\_\_.

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Name	Religious Background	Birthdate	Child or Adult?	Baptized	Confirmed	Received	Reaffirmed