

Liturgical Customary for The Episcopal Diocese of Virginia



Revised August 2025



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Preface to the August 2025 Edition

Since the initial edition of this customary in September 2023, I have received a great amount of feedback on the content it contains. Many people, ordained and lay, have been pleased and thankful for this attempt at what I hope is a useful tool in our common yet varied worship life. Many others, ordained and lay, have expressed concerns and / or dissatisfaction with elements of the document. And many others, ordained and lay, find themselves somewhere in the middle. With more than 175 worshipping communities and more than 500 priests and deacons in the Diocese of Virginia, I could not expect unanimity on the topics that it covers. I recognize and value the diversity of thought and practice that is this place.

I want the many members of the Diocese of Virginia to know that I have listened to the feedback that I have been given, prayed over it, and consulted with numerous individuals and groups. Having done that, I have incorporated a bit of new language and guidance in this edition, particularly in the areas of how we receive Holy Communion – language that I am sure will be received with the diversity of opinion with which was the original. And that is a good and holy thing.

I am thankful for the faithful leadership in this diocese around the ministry of corporate worship. The clergy in particular have a calling to this work, and to do it well, reverently, and with pastoral sensitivity – but that calling is not for those of us who wear clerical collars alone. The laity of this diocese share in this high calling, and I know through my experiences to date as your bishop that there are many faithful people in the congregations of Virginia who are committed to worship that gives glory to God and empowers us all to do the work we were created to do. So again, I thank you all.

Finally, let me say this – I trust the leaders of this diocese to do their very best. To try; to learn; and to live into that which we all have agreed to share. Not everyone or every church will worship the same way, and yet I know that we are all committed to the underlying principle that Common Worship binds us together as Episcopalians.

May God bless us in our offering of praise to the Almighty One who created us, sustains us, and loves us to our very core.

Yours in Christ,
The Right Reverend E. Mark Stevenson, Bishop of Virginia

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Liturgical Expectations in the Diocese of Virginia

*We, who are many and diverse, come together in Christ
through our worship, our common prayer.¹*

In addition to the 1979 Book of Common Prayer, other liturgical resources have been approved either for full or trial use by General Convention and may be used as directed. Clergy should familiarize themselves with these resources. Changes to approved liturgies should be done sparingly and purposefully and require the explicit permission of the Bishop. Clergy are also charged with providing formation opportunities for their congregations and communities to learn about and to engage with our tradition of common prayer.

The Revised Common Lectionary (as amended) is authorized for use in the Episcopal Church for Sundays and Holy Days. The 1979 Book of Common Prayer Daily Office Lectionary is authorized for its expressed purpose. Use of any other lectionaries require the explicit permission of the Bishop.

A list of liturgical resources authorized by the Episcopal Church, in addition to liturgy related facts and links, can be found at the website [EpiscopalCommonPrayer.org](https://www.episcopalchurch.org/what-we-believe/book-common-prayer).

Episcopalians in the Diocese of Virginia worship in many different styles, ranging from ancient to contemporary, formal to casual, etc. Yet all worship in the Episcopal Church is based on the principle of Common Prayer, giving worship a familiarity across our Diocese. Thus, worship in the Diocese should follow the acceptable rubrics of the Episcopal Church, in addition to being done purposefully and thoughtfully, regardless of the particular style of worship.

COMMUNION GUIDELINES

When the COVID-19 outbreak occurred, there were immediate questions and concerns about how the virus was transmitted and the safety of gathering, and these questions and concerns necessarily impacted our liturgical practices, including communion distribution.

According to the Book of Common Prayer: “Opportunity should be given to every communicant to receive the consecrated bread and wine separately,” adding that “the Sacrament may [also] be received in both kinds simultaneously, in a manner approved by the Bishop” (pp. 407-408). The uncertainties that we faced early on in the pandemic, however, led most dioceses to restrict the manner in which consecrated wine was

¹ "The Book of Common Prayer" in What We Believe, The Episcopal Church, <https://www.episcopalchurch.org/what-we-believe/book-common-prayer>.

offered. In some dioceses the restriction was absolute, and only consecrated bread was offered. These decisions were not made lightly, and were motivated by a desire to err on the side of caution. Through it all, we were reminded by theologians and pastors alike from all over the world – including our Presiding Bishop, Michael Curry – that the Church has long held the understanding that receiving Communion in one kind is fully sufficient.

As we adjusted to the realities of the pandemic, we did so in faithful expectation of the day where we might reclaim full Eucharistic participation in a manner that upholds the covenantal relationships between bishops, priests, and people, and lives into our shared Eucharistic theology. Now that we find ourselves in what may be considered a post-pandemic reality, we ought once again revisit the guidelines for our communion practices.

Going forward, and in all cases, the health of our congregants and community members remains of the utmost concern, and certain circumstances will require special consideration, such as administering communion to persons in nursing homes, persons in hospitals, or persons with particular physical ailments.

- All baptized Christians are welcome to receive communion, in accordance with Canon I.17.7 of the General Convention. Episcopalians invite all baptized people to receive, not because we take the Eucharist lightly, but because we take our Baptism so seriously.
- Those who are not baptized Christians are welcome to come forward during communion to receive a blessing from a priest or bishop or prayers from a deacon or lay intercessor.
- At no time should a person be questioned at the point of receiving Holy Eucharist as to their baptismal status.
- Gluten-free hosts/bread may be offered as an alternative to gluten-full hosts/bread but should not be the only offering.
- A single chalice containing wine should be placed on the altar for the Eucharistic Prayer. One or more flagons or cruets containing wine may be placed on the altar as necessary, in order to fill any needed additional chalices at the conclusion of the Prayer.
- The common cup should be offered and received in the traditional fashion (i.e., sipping directly from the common cup) for each communicant by a clergy person or lay chalice bearer/administrator. The chalice shall be carefully wiped with a purificator where a communicant's mouth has made contact with the cup (inside and outside edge), rotating after each person receives.
 - In 2020, a global public health coalition issued a report (found [here](#)) containing the following: Currently available data do not provide any support for the suggestion that the practice of sharing a common communion cup can contribute to the spread of COVID-19.

- In 2021, an epidemiological study written for the Anglican Church of Canada (found [here](#)) concluded the following: While it's true a shared cup could transmit infection through saliva, the risk is extremely low, with no documented cases of any disease ever being spread that way. In the case of COVID-19 the risk is even lower because it's spread by aerosols and droplets: the fact is, the risk of catching COVID is far greater from breathing air exhaled by an infectious person next to you than from sharing a common cup.
- The use of individual cups is no longer authorized. The common cup remains normative in the Episcopal Church as a matter of tradition and our shared sacramental theology.
- If intinction is made available, the clergy person or lay chalice bearer/administrator should dip the edge of the host or bread in the wine and then carefully place it on the tongue or in the hand of the person receiving communion. Other procedures that live into the spirit of this direction may be developed in a local context. All efforts should be made to minimize the number of fingers potentially coming into contact with wine that is to be consumed by mouth.
 - The practice of intinction has long been discouraged by medical authorities due to its own risk potential. Clergy and chalice bearers can attest to the frequency with which communicants who intinct inadvertently dip their fingertips into the wine. Intinction then holds a higher risk than drinking directly from the common cup, because fingers (and fingernails) are a repository for pathogens not found in saliva. See "Eucharistic practice and the risk of infection" by David H. Gould found [here](#).
- It should be made clear that all baptized persons may, but no person must, receive communion in both kinds to receive the fullness of Christ's body and blood. Our theology holds reception in one-kind (e.g., the bread alone) as full and complete.

These guidelines are written in an effort to comply with the expectations of the Canons of the General Convention, the Book of Common Prayer, and the traditions and Eucharistic theology of the Episcopal Church. We encourage you to reach out to the Bishop's Office with questions and concerns, and, as always, give great thanks for your perseverance and faithfulness in the face of our continually changing landscape.

WEDDINGS

The Constitution and Canons of the Episcopal Church can be found [here](#) and provide guidance and directives for the celebration and blessing of a marriage (Canons 18 & 19). While the Constitution and Canons of the Episcopal Church in their entirety should be known and followed in the Diocese of Virginia, the following directives regarding marriage should be particularly noted.

- Clergy (including postulants and candidates for Holy Orders) **shall not officiate a marriage outside of the episcopal liturgy** without the explicit permission of the Bishop. Clergy should officiate as ministers of the Gospel.
- Members of the clergy must conform to state law governing marriage, in addition to the Canons relevant to marriage (Canon 18: Sec. 1).
- Prior to officiating a marriage, clergy must determine: (a) that both persons have the right to marry; (b) that at least one of the persons is baptized; and (c) that both persons have been instructed by the clergy, or a person known by the clergy . . . in the nature, purpose, and meaning, as well as the rights, duties, and responsibilities of marriage (18: Sec. 3).
- Parties must sign the Declaration of Intention found in Canon 18: Section 4 prior to being married.
- A bishop or priest may pronounce a blessing upon a civil marriage using any of the liturgical forms authorized by the Church (18: Sec. 6).
- Where it is permitted by civil law that deacons may perform marriages, and no priest or bishop is available, a deacon may, **with permission of the Bishop**, perform such marriage, omitting the nuptial blessing (see BCP, p. 422). Deacons should consult with the Archdeacons prior to requesting the permission of the Bishop to officiate a wedding.
- Clergy **must consult with and obtain the consent of the Bishop** to marry a person who has been divorced per Canon 19: Sec. 3. The form for this process can be found in Appendix A.

FUNERALS

As the Book of Common Prayer reminds us, “The liturgy for the dead is an Easter liturgy. It finds all meaning in the resurrection. Because Jesus was raised from the dead, we too, shall be raised. The liturgy, therefore, is characterized by joy, in the certainty that ‘neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord” (p. 507). Our prayer book gifts us a beautiful liturgy to be offered at a tender time to congregants/community members and guests alike.

As stewards of the liturgy, pastors to our people, and representatives of The Episcopal Church, clergy should be well-prepared for all funerals that they officiate and/or participate in such that no clergy person should impede the beauty of the liturgy or the evangelism opportunity on offer with every funeral.

CHRISM

As a reminder, chrism should be fresh. The bishop consecrates chrism every year and clergy should make a concentrated effort to have a fresh stock at all times.

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.

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). 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:**
 - The Color of the Day should be used, unless an agreement on another Color is made with the bishop in advance.
 - 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.
- **For Bishop Bourlakas's visitations:**
 - All Eucharistic Prayers for Rite II may be used. If using Rite I use Eucharistic Prayer II. Authorized inclusive/expansive language versions of any of these Prayers may be used if the congregation is familiar with their usage. 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.
 - Bishop Bourlakas prefers not chanting.

- 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 (water rite), if requested for pastoral reasons; otherwise, the bishop performs the 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 or older teen, the bishop will confirm them immediately after Baptism.

FOR CONFIRMATION, RECEPTIONS, AND REAFFIRMATIONS

- For both Bishop Stevenson, 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.
 - Cards (approximately 3"x5") with the name of each candidate, their preferred pronouns, and the sacramental rite for which they are being presented, must be prepared in advance and given to the bishop upon arrival at the church.
- Bishop Bourlakas will stand to confirm. He will not, therefore, need a chair positioned for confirmation. Confirmands will also stand. Each Confirmand will approach the bishop when it is their turn.
- 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 & Bishop Bourlakas:**
 - 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 A | Petition to the Bishop for Consent to Solemnize a Marriage After Divorce or Annulment

When Clergy are asked to preside at the marriage of a couple of which one or both of the parties has previously been married, Clergy must submit to the Bishop a petition to Solemnize a Marriage after Divorce. If one or both of the parties has been divorced more than once, the clergy person must refer the couple to a professional counselor who has the skill to determine if the issues that caused the dissolution of the marriages have been rectified and if the parties can enter into the sacrament of marriage fully committed to its responsibilities. Clergy should provide ample time prior to the planned wedding to counsel the couple and, if necessary, to refer them to a counselor. Early during premarital preparation, Clergy should review the necessary requirements for the Bishop's consent for solemnizing a remarriage (listed in the form below), especially examining the final decree(s) of divorce or annulment.

The petition must be submitted to the Bishop's Office no later than one month before the wedding date to ensure adequate time for the Bishop's review. The Bishop will respond with either approval or denial of the petition. If you are petitioning the Bishop for permission to preside at a remarriage, you should not consent to do the marriage until the Bishop's consent is received.

Send the completed petition to the Office of the Bishop:

Email: bishopsoffice@episcopalvirginia.org

Mail: 110 W. Franklin Street, Richmond, VA 23220



Petition to the Bishop for Consent to Solemnize a Marriage After Divorce or Annulment

Petition submitted by (please type or print):

The Rev. _____

Church: _____

Mailing address: _____

Telephone: _____ Priest's email _____

Today's date: _____ Proposed Day & Date of Wedding: _____

To the Bishop:

I petition for consent to solemnize the marriage of (eliminate [b] or [c])

a. (Name) _____

whose prior marriage ended in divorce or annulment;

Date the divorce decree became legally effective: _____

and

b. (Name) _____

whose prior marriage ended in divorce or annulment

Date the divorce decree became legally effective: _____

or

c. (Name of other party, if not above) _____

Check "yes" or "no" to every question. Where "no" is checked, attach a full explanation.

Yes ☐ No ☐ 1. I have met in person with both parties and they are engaged in a program of pre-marital counseling satisfactory to me, or they have met in person with a priest of this church satisfactory to me and I have consulted that priest and am assured that they are engaged in a program of pre-marital counseling.

Yes ☐ No ☐ 2. Each party has signed the Declaration of Intention.
*Please attach a copy of the signed Declaration of Intention.**

Yes ☐ No ☐ 3. At least one of the parties is baptized.

Yes ☐ No ☐ 4. I have inquired of the parties whether they have consulted any other priest of this church regarding the proposed marriage and if they have, I have personally consulted that priest prior to submitting this petition.

Yes ☐ No ☐ 5. I have personally examined the final decree(s) of divorce or annulment and I certify that on the basis of my examination, the prior marriage(s) is(are) lawfully dissolved.

Yes ☐ No ☐ 6. I believe these parties intend a true Christian marriage.

Yes ☐ No ☐ 7. I have thoroughly discussed each party's personal readiness for marriage with them (or such discussion has occurred in a counseling program satisfactory to me).

Yes ☐ No ☐ 8. I believe each has realistically faced and evaluated the cause(s) of the deaths of the previous marriage(s).

Yes ☐ No ☐ 9. I am satisfied that each party has an adequate continuing concern for the previous spouse(s) and any children.

Yes ☐ No ☐ 10. I believe the marriage of this couple is likely to be a demonstrable sign of the spiritual union between Christ and his Church.

Yes ☐ No ☐ 11. I am willing to solemnize the marriage, if consent is granted.

Yes ☐ No ☐ 12. I am satisfied that the couple (or at least one party with the support of the other) intends to live out their marriage with the support of the Christian community as participants in some congregation of the church.

Yes ☐ No ☐ 13. At least one calendar year has elapsed since the date(s) of the final decree/s. (Exceptions are possible, but only if a minimum of 18 months' uninterrupted separation has occurred. Attach a full explanation for request for an exception.)

Yes ☐ No ☐ 14. All matters of property and custody have been settled.

Yes ☐ No ☐ 15. I have discussed with this couple, to the degree I believe to be appropriate, differences, if any, in age, income, religious discipline, patterns of conflict, and, especially for older couples with grown children, whether a written, pre-nuptial agreement on disposition of assets, property, or other estate planning would be appropriate for them to consider (or, such discussion of those issues has occurred in a counseling program satisfactory to me).

The following question is for situations where either or both parties has been divorced [or had a marriage annulled] more than once:

Yes ☐ No ☐ 16. I have received from a professional counselor a statement concerning this couple and the statement is attached along with an explanatory letter from me.

Where questions 1-15 are answered "Yes" and question 16 is not applicable,
no additional material is required to accompany this Petition.

I request consent of the Bishop for me to solemnize this marriage.

(Signature of member of the clergy submitting petition)

(Signature of the Bishop)

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.
- **Bishop Stevenson, Bishop Harris:** contact Lesley Birdie in the Bishop's Office (lbirdie@episcopalvirginia.org) to schedule a phone or Zoom call with your visiting bishop (typically scheduled during the week prior to your visitation).
- **Bishop Bourlakas:** contact Kristen Hester (khester@episcopalvirginia.org) in the Bishop's Office to schedule a phone or Zoom call with Bishop Bourlakas (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/confirmants/etc. and send to the communications office at communications@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:

Lesley Birdie, Executive Assistant to the Bishops
lbirdie@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) lbirdie@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 Scripture: _____ 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:

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) lbirdie@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 worshiping 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/themself 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, the host parish should submit a separate form on behalf of all participants for each church represented.

Church of Record name and location:

Church name and location where rites were performed.

Bishop:

Date of Visitation:

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

Appendix G | Sample Orders of Service

THE HOLY EUCHARIST + RENEWAL OF BAPTISMAL VOWS

It is the bishop's prerogative, when present, to be the principal celebrant at the Lord's Table, and to preach the Gospel. When there are is no candidate for Baptism, the Renewal of Baptismal Vows should take the place of the Nicene Creed when the bishop is present.

The Word of God

- A hymn, psalm, or anthem may be sung.
- The Opening Acclamation
- The Collect for Purity
- The Gloria (or another song of praise)
- The Collect of the Day
- The following lections should come from the RCL.
 - The First Lesson
 - The Psalm
 - The Second Lesson
- A hymn may be sung
 - The Gospel, read by a deacon or an assisting priest where a deacon is not present
- The Sermon, delivered by the bishop
- The Renewal of Baptismal Vows, led by the bishop
- The Prayers of the People
- The Confession of Sin, may be omitted during Eastertide
- The Absolution
- The Peace

The Holy Communion

- The Offertory Sentence
- A hymn, psalm, or anthem may be sung
- The Great Thanksgiving
- The Breaking of the Bread
- Postcommunion Prayer
- The Episcopal Blessing
- A hymn, psalm, or anthem may be sung
- The Dismissal, led by a deacon or an assisting priest when a deacon is not present; note that "Alleluia" is not appropriate outside of Eastertide per the rubrics.

THE HOLY EUCHARIST + HOLY BAPTISM

Holy Baptism is appropriately administered within the Eucharist as the chief service on a Sunday or other feast. **Holy Baptism may not take place during the season of Lent.** The bishop, when present, is the celebrant; and is expected to preach and preside at Baptism at the Eucharist.

The Word of God

- A hymn, psalm, or anthem may be sung.
- The Opening Acclamation (BCP p. 299)
- The Collect of the Day and/or The Collect for Baptism, is appropriate when a bishop is present (BCP pp. 203, 254)
- The following lections should come from the RCL.
 - The First Lesson
 - The Psalm
 - The Second Lesson
- A sequence hymn may be sung
 - The Gospel, read by a deacon or an assisting priest where a deacon is not present
- The Sermon, delivered by the bishop
- The Presentation and Examination of the Candidates, examination is done by the bishop
- The Baptismal Covenant, led by the bishop
- Prayers for the Candidates, appropriately led by a deacon, lay leader, baptismal sponsor, or assisting priest
- Thanksgiving over the Water, always done by the bishop
- Consecration of the Chrism (if necessary), always done by the bishop
- The Baptism

The bishop performs the baptism(s) unless the rector, for pastoral reasons, has sought permission. The order for Baptism is: infants, youth, and then adults. The liturgical order for **infant and youth** Baptism is as follows:

- N., I baptize you in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.
- N., you are sealed by the Holy Spirit in Baptism and marked as Christ's own for ever. Amen.

The liturgical order for **adult** Baptism (and subsequent, immediate Confirmation) is as follows:

- N., I baptize you in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.
- N., you are sealed by the Holy Spirit in Baptism and marked as Christ's own for ever.

- Defend, O Lord, your servant N. with your heavenly grace, that he may continue yours for ever, and daily increase in your Holy Spirit more and more, until he comes to your everlasting kingdom. Amen (BCP p. 418).

When these actions have been completed for all candidates, the liturgy continues as follows:

- Let us pray. Heavenly Father, we thank you that by water and the Holy Spirit you have bestowed upon these your servants the forgiveness of sin, and have raised them to the new life of grace. Sustain them, O Lord, in your Holy Spirit. Give them an inquiring and discerning heart, the courage to will and to persevere, a spirit to know and to love you, and the gift of joy and wonder in all your works. Amen.
- Let us welcome the newly baptized. We receive you . . . (BCP p. 308).
- The Peace

The Holy Communion

- The Offertory Sentence
- A hymn, psalm, or anthem may be sung; it is appropriate that oblations be presented by the newly baptized or their godparents.
- The Great Thanksgiving, Proper Preface of Baptism (BCP p. 381) should be used except on Principal Feasts
- The Breaking of the Bread
- Post communion Prayer + The Episcopal Blessing
- A hymn, psalm, or anthem may be sung
- The Dismissal, led by a deacon or an assisting priest when a deacon is not present; note that “Alleluia” is not appropriate outside of Eastertide per the rubrics.

THE HOLY EUCHARIST + HOLY BAPTISM + CONFIRMATION (+RECEPTION AND/OR REAFFIRMATION)

Holy Baptism is appropriately administered within the Eucharist as the chief service on a Sunday or other feast. Holy Baptism **may not** take place during the season of Lent.

The bishop, when present, is the celebrant; and is expected to preach and preside at Baptism and at the Eucharist.

The Word of God

- A hymn, psalm, or anthem may be sung.
- The Opening Acclamation, (BCP p. 299)
- The Collect of the Day + The Collect for Baptism, is appropriate when a bishop is present (BCP pp. 203, 254) and should be used even if Confirmations will also occur.
- The following lections should come from the RCL.
 - The First Lesson
 - The Psalm
 - The Second Lesson
- A sequence hymn may be sung
 - The Gospel, read by a deacon or an assisting priest where a deacon is not present
- The Sermon, delivered by the bishop
- The Presentation and Examination of the Candidates, examination is done by the bishop
- The Baptismal Covenant, led by the bishop
- Prayers for the Candidates, appropriately led by a deacon, lay leader, baptismal sponsor, or assisting priest
- Thanksgiving over the Water, always done by the bishop
- Consecration of the Chrism (if necessary), always done by the bishop
- The Baptism

The bishop performs the baptism(s) unless the rector, for pastoral reasons, has sought permission. The order for Baptism is: infants, youth, and then adults.

The liturgical order for **infant and youth** Baptism is as follows:

- N., I baptize you in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.
- N., you are sealed by the Holy Spirit in Baptism and marked as Christ's own for ever. Amen.

The liturgical order for **adult** Baptism is as follows:

- N., I baptize you in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.
- N., you are sealed by the Holy Spirit in Baptism and marked as Christ's own for ever.

- Defend, O Lord, your servant N. with your heavenly grace, that he may continue yours for ever, and daily increase in your Holy Spirit more and more, until he comes to your everlasting kingdom. Amen (BCP p. 418).

When these actions have been completed for all candidates, the liturgy continues as follows:

- Let us pray. Heavenly Father, we thank you that by water and the Holy Spirit you have bestowed upon these your servants the forgiveness of sin, and have raised them to the new life of grace. Sustain them, O Lord, in your Holy Spirit. Give them an inquiring and discerning heart, the courage to will and to persevere, a spirit to know and to love you, and the gift of joy and wonder in all your works. Amen.
- Let us welcome the newly baptized. We receive you . . . (BCP p. 308).

The Confirmation, Reception, and/or Reaffirmation, the liturgical action is as follows:

- The bishop says to the congregation: Let us now pray for these persons who have renewed their commitment to Christ Almighty God, we thank you that by the death and resurrection of your Son Jesus Christ (BCP p. 309). The bishop, with the recipient(s) kneeling, lays hands upon each one and says
- For Confirmation: Strengthen, O Lord, your servant N. with your Holy Spirit; empower him for your service; and sustain him all the days of his life. Amen.
- For Reception: N., we recognize you as a member of the one holy catholic and apostolic Church, and we receive you into the fellowship of this Communion. God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, bless, preserve, and keep you. Amen.
- For Reaffirmation: N., may the Holy Spirit, who has begun a good work in you, direct and uphold you in the service of Christ and his kingdom. Amen. Then the bishop says: Almighty and everliving God, let your fatherly hand ever be over these your servants; let your Holy Spirit ever be with them; and so lead them in the knowledge and obedience of your Word, that they may serve you in this life, and dwell with you in the life to come; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.
- The Peace

The Holy Communion

- The Offertory Sentence
- A hymn, psalm, or anthem may be sung; it is appropriate that oblations be presented by the newly baptized or their godparents.
- The Great Thanksgiving, Proper Preface of Baptism (BCP p. 381) should be used except on Principal Feasts

- The Breaking of the Bread
- Post communion Prayer + The Episcopal Blessing
- A hymn, psalm, or anthem may be sung
- The Dismissal, led by a deacon or an assisting priest when a deacon is not present; note that “Alleluia” is not appropriate outside of Eastertide per the rubrics.

THE HOLY EUCHARIST + CONFIRMATION (+ RECEPTION AND/OR REAFFIRMATION)

Where there is no Baptism, the rites of Confirmation, Reception, and the Reaffirmation of Baptismal Vows are administered in the form provided on page 413 of the BCP.

The bishop, when present, is the celebrant; and is expected to preach and preside.

The Word of God

- A hymn, psalm, or anthem may be sung.
- The Opening Acclamation, (BCP p. 413)
- The Collect of the Day and/or The Collect at Confirmation (BCP p. 203, 254)
The following lections should come from the RCL.
- The First Lesson
- The Psalm
- The Second Lesson
- A sequence hymn may be sung
- The Gospel, read by a deacon or an assisting priest where a deacon is not present
- The Sermon, delivered by the bishop
- The Presentation and Examination of the Candidates, examination is done by the bishop
- The Baptismal Covenant, led by the bishop
- Prayers for the Candidates, appropriately led by a deacon, lay leader, sponsor, or assisting priest using the petitions on 305-306 of the BCP with the bishop offering the final prayer (BCP p. 418).
- The Confirmation, Reception, and/or Reaffirmation, the bishop, with the recipient(s) kneeling, lays hands upon each one and says
 - For **Confirmation**: Strengthen, O Lord, your servant N. with your Holy Spirit; empower him for your service; and sustain him all the days of his life. Amen.
 - For **Reception**: N., we recognize you as a member of the one holy catholic and apostolic Church, and we receive you into the fellowship of this Communion. God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, bless, preserve, and keep you. Amen.
 - For **Reaffirmation**: N., may the Holy Spirit, who has begun a good work in you, direct and uphold you in the service of Christ and his kingdom. Amen. Then the bishop says Almighty and everliving God, let your fatherly hand ever be over these your servants; let your Holy Spirit ever be with them; and so lead them in the knowledge and obedience of your Word, that they may serve you in this life, and dwell with you in the life to come; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. The bishop concludes with the prayer on page 419 of the BCP.
- The Peace

The Holy Communion

- The Offertory Sentence
- A hymn, psalm, or anthem may be sung; it is appropriate that oblations be presented by the persons newly confirmed.
- The Great Thanksgiving, Proper Preface of Baptism (BCP p. 381) should be used except on Principal Feasts
- The Breaking of the Bread
- Postcommunion Prayer + The Episcopal Blessing
- A hymn, psalm, or anthem may be sung
- The Dismissal, led by a deacon or an assisting priest when a deacon is not present; note that “Alleluia” is not appropriate outside of Eastertide per the rubrics.