

The Episcopal Diocese of Montana

BISHOP'S VISITATION GUIDELINES

I look forward to visiting with your congregation. I hope that our time together will be an occasion when we can celebrate our life together as a diocesan family, when we can grow to know each other better, and when we can encourage each other in the ministries to which our Lord has called us. I would like to spend Saturday afternoon and Sunday morning among you. Our focus during this time will be our Risen Lord present in Sacrament, Word, and in each other.

To accomplish these goals, let me outline what I hope can happen during my visitation. First, I plan to arrive early to mid-Saturday afternoon. I want to meet with the priest and his or her family and host them at dinner out that evening. I will have made accommodations at a local hotel. I ask, however, that the priest (or senior warden, if there is no priest) make a reservation for dinner at a nice restaurant close at hand. My wife accompanies on visitations as her work schedule allows; if she is not present, it is because she is employed that weekend.

On Sunday, I plan to preach and celebrate at Holy Eucharist at all services. I will base the sermon on the Prayer Book Lectionary for that day. If you have a children's sermon, please notify me of that fact. As required by the rubrics, all hymns should come from Hymnal 1982, Wonder, Love and Praise, Lift Every Voice Vols 1 and 2, Voices Found, or Hymnal 1940. Also the texts of any special music must come from the BCP or the scriptures, or be closely congruent with those sources.

If there are to be confirmations, receptions or reaffirmations, the color of the day is red; otherwise, please use the usual color of the season. Please have in place a nice-looking chair at the top of the chancel steps. During the confirmations, reaffirmations, and receptions, parents and sponsors are encouraged to stand around the confirmand, but it is appropriate that only I lay hands on the candidate. Confirmands and others should be instructed to bring prayer books with them as they are presented, so that they can answer the questions with enthusiasm.

I will invite the priest to concelebrate with me and to serve as chalice. As noted in the Prayer Book, only one chalice should be on the altar during the Eucharistic prayer. I will administer the consecrated bread, and the cup should be administered by the ordained in the parish; as stated in the BCP, we use lay chalicers only when there are not sufficient clerics.

I will take the role of celebrant as marked in the BCP. Since the visitation is a special occasion, you may use festival elements (chanting, incense, etc.) as is customary in your church.

Birthday and anniversary prayers during the announcements should be handled by the local priest. Any special certificates or prayer books needing my signature should be ready in the sacristy.

If your congregation has a deacon, he or she should vest and take part in the liturgy (read the Gospel, lead the Prayers of the People, set the Table, and dismiss the people). During the procession, the deacon should immediately precede me. The deacon should attend the Vestry meeting. Additionally, the deacon and his or her family are invited to share Saturday dinner with the priest and me and our families.

If there is a baptism, I will baptize the candidate.

I am happy to attend any reception that might be planned after the Eucharist, but please make sure the focus of the reception are those who have been baptized, confirmed, received or reaffirmed. Please do not prepare any special high-calorie food for me.

I would like to meet with the Vestry and other leaders either Saturday afternoon or Sunday morning or early afternoon. Plan for about an hour together. Please have the parish register, budget and financial statements available for inspection. I need to inspect the service records, and the register of baptisms, confirmations, marriages, communicants, and burials; these should be ready for me to inspect when I arrive. I will preside at the Vestry meeting, including calling the meeting to order, praying, and setting the agenda.

I will be available to accompany the priest on any pastoral visits that may be deemed appropriate.

Thank you for your ministry in this diocese, and for the extra work entailed in an episcopal visitation.

Revised Friday, January 28, 2011