

Customary for the Bishop's Visitation
Diocese of El Camino Real
December, 2012

Dear Friends,

The last time I updated my customary was Advent, 2009. It is time to do so again. This customary will address visitations as well as marriage and same-sex blessings.

Visitations are a central part of my ministry with you, and I thoroughly enjoy being present in our congregations for worship as often as possible. With 47 congregations in El Camino Real, realistically I can only be present on Sundays once every 15 to 18 months, however, other opportunities for connecting with vestries, congregations and deaneries are easy to arrange. Several have had me for retreats, strategic visioning days, forums, festivals and celebrations. Never hesitate to ask for time with me on a day other than a Sunday. I enjoy being with you!

The customary is designed to assist clergy and parish leaders with easy planning and communication for visitations, policies or canonical practices. I hope this helps to facilitate a meaningful and fluid worship life for all as well as answer policy questions.

VISITATIONS

The celebration of the Holy Eucharist is at the heart of what will happen at a visitation, along with preaching, baptism, confirmation, reception, reaffirmation and other celebrations specific to the congregation. As well, fellowship time with the congregation and the vestry are always welcome. I anticipate that if there are specific issues that need addressing, concerns or causes for special celebrations, you will let me know these so I may more fully engage in the life of the congregation. If there is more time needed than is possible on a Sunday, please ask for time with me on another occasion. I can, for instance, come to a vestry meeting close to a visitation, or, if you plan far enough in advance, spend a whole weekend with you for a retreat that would culminate in a Sunday visitation. We have options!

Some of what follows will be familiar, but it is good to have it all in one place. Logistical details will also be prepared with my assistant, Mary Beth Powell, who will contact you well in advance to confirm the visitation and to begin the planning process. If you have specific dates that you would like me to visit, such as a feast day, please feel free to ask. Please know we will do our

best to accommodate you, but that consideration is given to making sure all our congregations are visited within the 15-18 month time period.

Some key points and personal preferences include:

Liturgy: The liturgy for our worship together, and as a general rule in our diocese, needs to follow the Book of Common Prayer, Enriching our Worship or other General Convention approved liturgies. You do not need to seek special permission from me for any Convention approved liturgies. If, however, you wish to deviate from approved liturgies and their intended use of The Episcopal Church for a visitation, or at any time, this needs to be discussed with me first. It is not that I object to some temporary changes or alterations, but, I think that liturgy and the decisions we make around it, need to adhere largely to our approved texts, and, that use of other liturgies should be something we consider together. As well, we have as a clergy community discerned this practice together as something good for our diocese at this time, and as a matter of collegial respect for one another. I hope that all can find a way to be creative and respectful at the same time.

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

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

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

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

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

Chaplain: My preference is to have Jo Weber, James Booth, Robert Seifert or Rob Sommer accompany me as my chaplain. They are attuned to my preferences and assist me in smooth

presiding of the liturgy. If there is a deacon in the parish, it works well if they serve as deacon of the table, being free of my need for a chaplain. As well, chaplains and I always appreciate when they are introduced to the congregation.

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

Meeting with candidates: I enjoy doing this for about 20 to 30 minutes, depending on the number of candidates; allowing me about 15 minutes to vest and prepare for worship. I anticipate that candidates are liturgically prepared, and enjoy speaking with them about their journey and what brings them to this day. In some cases, meeting with a large number of candidates during a preparation session in the week beforehand is preferable.

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

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

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

I use oil – I love oil – for confirmation, reception and reaffirmation – and just about any other time I can manage it! It offers a reminder to people of their baptism, it carries with it a symbol of God's abundant outpouring of love, is a sign of inclusion and is a gesture that is deeply meaningful to people. I prefer to have oil in a bowl; this is a detail that may be arranged with the chaplain for the day. I also lay hands for all being confirmed, received, or reaffirming. It has been customary to do this seated in the chair, placed in the center in front of the altar. Kneeling can be meaningful to people, however, standing, in a different way, may be as well. The gesture of kneeling may feel too intimate or spiritually awkward for some, while standing may offer a greater sense of their personal and empowered decision to participate in the sacramental rite. It may also be logistically easier for me to move around a semi-circle of candidates than for each to kneel in front of me while seated. I am happy to do either, and in fact, it might be an interesting point of reflection in your preparation classes.

A few comments on Confirmation, Reception and Reaffirmation:

Sometimes there are questions of who should be confirmed, who should be received, and who should be reaffirmed. Changes made in the canons with respect to church membership by the General Convention of 1985, and refined in 1988, have made this fairly simple in practical application:

Canon 17 states:

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

It is expected that all adult members of this Church, after appropriate instruction, will have made a mature public affirmation of their faith and commitment to the responsibilities of their Baptism and will have been confirmed or received by the laying on of hands by a Bishop of this Church or by a Bishop of a Church in communion with this Church. Those who have previously made a mature public commitment in another Church may be received by the laying on of hands by a Bishop of this Church, rather than confirmed.

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

To help clarify, confirmation is for children who were baptized in The Episcopal Church or who came to this church with their families before making a “mature commitment”. Confirmation is also appropriate for those of any age who are making a mature commitment for the first time. Reception is for those who have previously made a mature commitment in *any other Christian church*, regardless of the pedigree of the minister. The previous practice of receiving Roman Catholics and Orthodox Christians, and confirming everyone else, no longer applies. The requirement of *Called to Common Mission*, that we receive ELCA Lutherans and not confirm them, is not an exception to the canonical position, but is consistent with it. Since the canons require that all persons come “under the hands” of the bishop, persons who are received are, for canonical purposes, understood to be confirmed.

MARRIAGE and SAME-SEX BLESSINGS

In this diocese, we adhere to the Canons for Marriage, including using the authorized liturgies from the Book of Common Prayer. As an Episcopal clergy person, you are meant to use only BCP or other General Convention approved texts.

At this time, the State of California does not allow marriage for same-sex couples. In the Diocese of El Camino Real, however, we have blessed these faithful relationships for some years now. It is my policy that same-sex couples should be treated in the same canonical manner as heterosexual couples regarding previous relationships, children, and the understanding of what it means to be in a monogamous Christian partnership. As well, clergy should have the agreement of the Vestry or Bishop's Committee since the joining in blessing and in marriage is a community event. The Liturgy for Same-Sex Blessings, "The Witnessing and Blessing of a Lifelong Covenant" has now been approved by our General Convention and is the authorized liturgy for blessing same-sex couples. I encourage you to utilize the resources created to accompany this work, "I Will Bless You and You Will be a Blessing", as well as review the final resolution of this major shift in the pastoral offerings of our church (this resource may be found online and was included in The Good News Along the King's Highway Friday, December 7, 2012).

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

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

+Mary