



Episcopal Diocese of Massachusetts

Office of the Bishop *The Rt. Rev. Julia E. Whitworth, Bishop Diocesan*

Bishop Julia E. Whitworth
Massachusetts, XVII
Visitation Customary

Dear Friends,

Pastoral visits to worshipping communities in the Diocese of Massachusetts provide me wonderful opportunities to meet the people who comprise the Body of Christ here and to knit together our diocese as one Church. I look forward to these visits with joy.

I trust that my visit to your congregation will be something you consider both a regular event and a special occasion in the life of your community. In preparation, here are some guidelines to shape the time we will share during my visitation.

SHAPE OF VISITATION

In most cases, a visitation will include the following elements:

1. A pre-visitation meeting with the Rector or senior cleric in charge.
2. Combined Sunday worship at which I will celebrate and preach.
(Baptisms, Confirmations, Receptions, and Reaffirmations are welcome, please see the addendum for specific customary information about these rites.)
3. Time after worship with the Congregation
(Either a structured meeting or unstructured reception, is fine.)
4. A one-hour meeting with the vestry

PREPARATION

AT LEAST ONE MONTH PRIOR TO MY VISIT

Please be in touch with Meredith Rippert, my executive assistant (Mrippert@diomass.org) to schedule a one-hour, pre-visitation meeting with me. I enjoy the time to check in with you personally and pastorally as well as to prepare for the visitation. Zoom is fine. This meeting **MUST** take place at least seven days before my visitation.

AT LEAST TWO WEEKS PRIOR TO MY VISIT (and before my pre-visitation meeting with you):

Please email the following items to Meredith Rippert, my executive assistant (Mrippert@diomass.org):

1. A draft worship bulletin for any service in which I will participate.
2. A completed visitation form sent to you in advance of the visitation, including the names of those who will be baptized, confirmed, received, or who will renew their baptismal vows during the visitation. This form is also available on our website [HERE](#).
3. Your most recent Annual Report,
4. Your end of year financials from the previous year (if not in annual report)
5. Your budget for the current year (if not in annual report)
6. The last 2-3 months of vestry minutes
7. The best contact number for me to reach out on the day of the visitation

AT LEAST ONE WEEK BEFORE MY VISIT

Please email Meredith the final copy of the leaflet for Sunday worship, including any changes we discussed in our pre-visitation meeting. Please include in that email a reminder of the best contact number/person to reach on the day of the visitation for last minute issues.

DURING THE VISITATION

Timing and Arrival:

At the occasion of my visit, I prefer for you to combine your services so I might be with the entire body of the congregation in one service. If yours is a large congregation, however, and that is not advisable or feasible, I am happy to be present at more than one service. Please confirm with me before announcing multiple services to your congregation.

If there will be baptisms, confirmations, receptions, or other pastoral rites, please plan for me to meet with those candidates and with their sponsors prior to the service. Please plan for 30-45 minutes for this meeting and ensure that my executive assistant has this information in preparation for my visit. It is best if we can meet in the sanctuary space to avoid moving groups of people around. Please have a name tag for each candidate, with their first (and middle if applicable) names, and an indication of which rite they will receive (C, RC, RA). Please have the registry for these rites positioned with the parish registry, so I may sign both together following the service. [For more on Confirmations, et al, please see the appendix below.]

I will plan to arrive 30 minutes prior to the meeting with candidates or 45 minutes before the start of the first service (if there is no meeting). Please have a parking place clearly marked, and please assign someone to look out for my arrival to assist with my finding my way and carrying my things.

Preparation for the Service:

If there are baptisms, vestment colors should be white. If there are no baptisms, vestment colors are seasonal. If your parish owns presider's vestments which coordinate with other appointments, I am happy to wear the vestments of the parish.

If possible, please have a flag or banner stand available for my crozier, placed near my seat.

I am happy to preside from a cathedra or similar chair in the center of the chancel, if your space makes such a practice possible. This is particularly fitting for Confirmation/Reception. If it does not, I will preside from the presider's chair or stall, and perform the Episcopal rites standing.

The Revised Common Lectionary (Episcopal Edition) is the standard for the Diocese of Massachusetts. Please use the Propers of the Day, including all three readings and the Psalm. When there are choices between readings, I prefer to follow the track that is in regular use at your parish. If you have reason to propose a departure from the lectionary readings, please contact Meredith Rippert with this request at least two weeks prior to the visitation.

I prefer the use of the Eucharistic prayers from the Book of Common Prayer, Rite II, Prayers A, B, or C. I am also comfortable with all rites in Enriching Our Worship and BCP, Rite I. If it is your practice to use gender expansive language at your parish, please use the authorized rites of our Church found at <https://www.episcopalcommonprayer.org/existing-liturgies1.html>. I am happy to chant any parts of the service. If you hope to use alternative resources, please contact Meredith Rippert at least two weeks prior to the visitation and provide the text of any proposed alternative resources.

Please prepare for me a service bulletin with all parts of the full service printed, including hymns. Thank you.

Please discuss with me beforehand any liturgical practices that you would like to incorporate as part of the visitation that fall outside of baptism, confirmation, and Eucharist. I am happy to consider, for instance, a special blessing, but I need to know about it prior to the visitation.

In the Worship:

I will celebrate and preach all services. Although I LOVE baptizing God's people (especially children), if a priest has a special relationship with a baptismal candidate or their family, I am happy to share that privilege by having the priest perform the water rite, after which I will chrismate. If there are no baptisms, confirmations, or reception, the liturgy for my visitation may include the renewal of baptismal vows.

The respective orders of ministry should participate in their various roles in the service, with lay people reading the first two lessons, as well as the Psalm, if it is not sung. When present, a deacon should read the gospel, invite the confession of sin, prepare the altar, and offer the dismissal. If a deacon is not present, a priest may read the gospel, prepare the altar, and offer the dismissal. In that circumstance, I will bid the confession. Acolytes, lay readers, and chalice bearers should serve in worship as they are regularly accustomed to doing.

If handwashing before the Eucharist prayer is part of your congregation's practice, I prefer to do so after the presentation of the Gifts and Oblations. If ablutions following Communion are a part of your practice, other members of the altar party should attend to those at the credence table rather than the altar.

I anticipate that a member of the clergy or a leader from the congregation will offer the announcements during the service. It is my preference that those occur between the Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Table, so I may say a few words of gratitude and bid the offering. The offering is to be designated to support theological formation for those pursuing ordination in our diocese.

As much as possible, please avoid "welcoming" me to the parish, to normalize that the Bishop is the Ordinary of all parishes and congregations of the diocese. If gifts are to be presented to me (which is lovely but not necessary), I prefer that they are presented at the fellowship hour, not during worship.

Usually, a member of my staff will accompany and assist me in worship, as Chaplain, and to take notes during time with the vestry. At times I may ask you to arrange a lay leader, youth, or clergy member to serve as my Chaplain.

Please note:

I prefer the use of a large priest's host (or loaf of bread, if it's your practice) for the celebration of the Eucharist, along with a single chalice on the table, in accordance with the rubrics of the Prayer Book (p. 407). A ciborium and flagon may also be present, and other vessels for gluten or alcohol-free elements, if necessary. Additional chalices may be filled from the flagon once consecrated. The Communion of the people should be from the elements consecrated at the Eucharist. If the elements are depleted, additional bread or wine may be consecrated as needed, or reserve Sacrament may be used.

The use of individual cups for Communion will not be permitted at my visitations. If that is the practice of your congregation, I ask that you begin a formation process with your congregation to prepare them for using only the common chalice on that Sunday. I will be working on a separate document to expand upon this shift, in this post-Covid moment. As always, in our tradition, Communion in one kind is full Communion with Christ.

While best practices indicate that intinction is in fact *less* hygienic than drinking from the common cup, I will permit the practice of intinction at parishes where it is already in place, and the use of a separate cup for intinction if it is poured at the altar, after the Eucharistic Prayer.

AFTER WORSHIP

I look forward to spending time in conversation with members of the congregation, either during a coffee hour or parish reception. If appropriate, I would be glad to lead a time of more structured discussion during that time, either by responding to questions from the parish or by presenting on a particular topic that may be helpful to the life of the congregation. I am particularly eager to share our diocesan vision, or to lead a conversation about congregational development.

MEETING WITH THE VESTRY OR EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

I anticipate meeting with the vestry, executive committee, or mission council for about an hour during my visitation. This meeting will likely take place after the congregational coffee hour. On some occasions, I may join a previously scheduled vestry meeting via zoom in the week prior or after the visitation. This should be arranged with Meredith Rippert prior to the visitation.

This is a special meeting of the parish leadership and should NOT include matters of regular business. Instead, it is an opportunity for us to deepen our relationship and to discuss the life of your congregation and your place in our diocese. I especially hope to learn about your ministries within your local community, about your dreams and frustrations, and more about how you are striving to embody Jesus' love to the world.

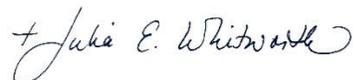
AFTER MY VISIT

Please share any follow up questions or requests with Meredith Rippert or your regional canon. They will ensure that your questions are addressed to the corresponding leader or member of diocesan staff.

If you need to contact me the day of my visit, you can reach me by call or text at my cell number, previously shared with all clergy of the diocese.

I look forward to being with you and your community.

In Christ, with love,



The Right Reverend Julia Whitworth
17th Bishop of the Diocese of Massachusetts

Additional Notes on BAPTISM, CONFIRMATION, and RECEPTION

Our Prayer Book names a bishop's visitation among the five occasions especially fitting for baptism.

Following the shape of this ancient practice, I will plan to preside over the rite, sharing its administration with all the orders present. So, I will ask for the presentations of those to be baptized, ask the various questions of the candidates, sponsors, and congregation, and bless the water. A deacon or layperson should lead the prayers for the candidates. I will offer the post-baptismal prayers and anoint the newly baptized.

Whenever a bishop is present, the Prayer Book provides for the ministration of baptism and confirmation in one liturgy, using the rite which begins on page 299. If there are confirmations but no baptism, then the rite is the one beginning on page 413. When there are baptisms and/or confirmation, after the sermon is finished we will continue with the examination of the candidates. It may be helpful to include a hymn as candidates make their way to the chancel steps or wherever the examination will take place.

When an adult is baptized in the presence of a bishop, this suffices for confirmation as well. Adult baptizands should not be presented again, but may be given a confirmation certificate as well as a baptismal certificate.

The question of who should be confirmed, who should be received, and who should reaffirm their baptismal faith often arises given the various changes in the Canons of The Episcopal Church over the last few years. The following is intended to clarify this matter.

The sacramental rite of Holy Confirmation (including Reception and Reaffirmation) provides an opportunity for a mature and public affirmation of our baptismal commitment to follow Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord within the body of Christ, the Church. The presence of a Bishop as a representative of our apostolic and catholic heritage, is a symbolic reminder that the body of Christ is not only the local community of faith, but the church catholic dispersed throughout the world. In addition, for persons whose Christian journey has been lived out previously in other Christian traditions, this rite sacramentally marks the new relationship within this particular branch of Christ's holy, catholic church.

The canons say the following: "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." (Title I Canon 17, Section 1c.)

In this light, the following guidelines apply in the Diocese of Massachusetts:

- *Preparation:* All persons confirmed or received should be prepared for the sacrament after a structured, substantive and significant process of catechesis and formation in the faith.
- *Confirmation for Young People:* Young persons baptized prior to the age of discretion should be presented for confirmation after a structured, substantive and significant experience of catechesis and formation.
- *Confirmation of Adults:* Adults who have been baptized with water in the name of the Triune God but who have not previously made a mature public affirmation of faith should be confirmed after an adult process of catechesis and formation.
- *Persons to be Received into this Communion:* Persons who have been baptized previously and have made a mature commitment of faith in any other Christian church may be received. This is a change from the previous practice of receiving persons only

from the Roman Catholic Church, the Orthodox Churches, and of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. As mentioned previously it is expected that such persons will be prepared after a process of catechesis and formation appropriate for those being received.

- *Re-affirmation of Baptismal Vows:* The opportunity to re-affirm baptismal vows with the laying on of hands by a Bishop is intended to provide an opportunity for the faithful to sacramentally mark significant experiences of spiritual growth, formation or study with a renewed faith commitment to our Lord and the way of a disciple. As with baptism and confirmation this moment in the person's spiritual journey should also be marked with a certificate.
- For canonical and statistical purposes all persons who have been confirmed or received are considered both baptized and confirmed.
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Please be sure to include the names of all candidates being baptized, confirmed or received in the visitation form and send to Meredith Rippert at mrrippert@diomass.org at least two weeks prior to the visitation.