

Visitation Customary

The Rt. Rev. Kara Wagner Sherer

“And the Word became flesh and lived among us...” John 1:14

Praying Shapes Believing by Leonel L. Mitchell

*“At every such visitation the visiting Bishop shall preside at the Holy Eucharist and at the Initiatory Rites, as required, preach the Word, examine the records of the Congregation required by Canon III.9.6.c, and examine the life and ministry of the Clergy and Congregation according to Canon III.9.6.
-Canon III.12.3(a)1.*

The What and the Why of a Customary

A customary provides a path for us to make an Episcopal visitation a celebration of your congregation’s mission and ministry. It outlines my preferences for the visitation, so you know how to prepare, and what to expect. It has more than just a practical side to it. Your worship reveals how your community embodies our faith and beliefs. It enables me to get to know you and your leadership so that I can better serve and support your parish.

I am sure the bishop’s presence creates a disruption in the normal flow of parish life. But please don’t add anxiety to that disruption. It is good to be prepared and rehearsed but whatever happens in the service was meant to be. Fortunately, God has a great sense of humor.

Visitation Planning Form

After you have reviewed the customary, please complete the online [Visitation Planning form](#) at least [6] weeks prior to the visitation. This will help me collect all the necessary details covered in the customary. I also ask that you utilize the visitation checklist included on p. 5.

Scheduling

Episcopal visitations will be scheduled to balance the following priorities:

- The length of time since the last Episcopal visitation, at least once a year
- The need to schedule Episcopal rites: major parish anniversaries, dedication of new buildings, groundbreaking, etc., which can be scheduled on days other than Sunday.
- Baptism, confirmation, reaffirmation, and reception.
- Recognizing/commissioning of first responders, community leaders, lay leaders including sextons and other administrative staff.
- Address particular pastoral needs of the parish.
- The celebration of a patron saint or other significant event in the life of the parish.

The scheduling of visitations will be coordinated by the Rector (or Wardens in absence of a rector) and the Bishop’s Office. As a rule, I do not return to a parish for a regular pastoral visitation until all other parishes have been visited.

To facilitate planning, the visitation schedule is created to cover the next yearly rotation cycle. You may request upcoming dates, but normally we will not make final commitments more than six months in advance. Even with great care given to my visitation schedule, there will still be some need for flexibility. There will be parish emergencies, personal illness, travel delays, and a host of other things that may require last minute rescheduling.

Communication

A visitation is meant to be a supportive and pastoral time for all of you. Please let me know in advance if there are particular areas of conflict or concern, “hot-button” issues in the parish or community that I should be sensitive to. Please feel free to schedule a meeting through Sarah before the visitation if needed. I will also offer feedback to the rector, wardens or vestry after the visitation.

Confirmations/Receptions

I will be my joy to confirm, receive, or reaffirm at each visitation. I will also hold regional confirmation services with several parishes; especially for small parishes this can be an energizing larger service and a symbol of our unity.

- Plan to use the liturgical color of the day, white for baptism, or red for confirmation or festal.
- I would like to meet candidates one hour before the start of the liturgy and for about **40 minutes**.
- I would like to be present for a walkthrough of the service **20 minutes** before the start of the service.
- The candidates will stand at the front with their sponsors and kneel for confirmation. As I approach each candidate approaches the bishop and clearly says: “Bishop Kara, my name is . . . and I would like to be _____”. This simple statement encourages the candidate to own their decision.
- It is my preference to have clergy or other sponsors, and family with the candidate to lay hands on the candidate’s shoulder at the laying on of hands.
- Please use the Propers for the Day or Special Feast, not the Confirmation Propers.

When there are no candidates, I would like you to discern a celebration of missional practices, dedication of new initiatives, commissioning of lay leaders, community-centered celebrations, or such, as part of the official Episcopal visit.

Vestments

My preference is to wear and alb, stole, cope and mitre. I will change into a chasuble at the offertory. If you don’t have a chasuble, or this will frighten folks, please let me know! I’m flexible.

Liturgy

- If you regularly have two or more services, I am happy to preside and preach at both; if it is easier for you to combine into one main service that is also fine.
- Please plan to use the rite that you are using for the season, Rite I or II, or Enriching Our Worship and any special elements or local customs e.g., chanting, children’s sermon, etc. Please include these on the Visitation Planning Sheet.

- You are welcome to use the Revised Common Lectionary, please indicate whether you are using Track 1 or 2, or A Women's Lectionary for the Whole Church (available for years A, B, and C from Church Publishing).
- When we have a confirmation liturgy, I suggest that we move from the Peace to the Offertory, omitting the Prayers of the People and Confession.
- Please use the Episcopal Blessing, BCP p. 523.

Baptism/Chrismation

If baptism is scheduled, please ask the person or parents if they would prefer the local clergy person to do the baptism; I am happy to do it but defer to the person they know best. I am happy to do the chrismation.

Holy Eucharist

If there is a deacon present, they should set the table, otherwise I will. I prefer a large bread (either homemade or the hosts that break into 25 pieces), a carafe of wine, one chalice and paten, and a box or dish of extra hosts if needed. I am happy to consecrate gluten-free wafers, grape juice, or non-alcoholic wine, if that is your practice. During the Angus Dei a second chalice and paten can be brought to the table and filled. I will ask all those serving communion to hold up the elements and join in the words "The Gifts of God for the People of God." I prefer that we serve the people first. The communion servers serve each other after everyone has been served.

The Offering

- Please designate the unpledged offering to a local charity or not-for-profit (but not an internal church program) with which your church has a relationship. You might invite a member of that organization to give a short introduction during the announcements.
- You are also welcome to give the unpledged offering, or a portion of it, to my discretionary fund. Please make the check payable to The Episcopal Diocese of Rochester, 3825 East Henrietta Road – Suite 100, Henrietta, NY 14467. Memo line: Bishop's Discretionary Fund.

Parish Records

- Please have the parish records (Burials, Baptisms, Confirmations, Marriages) available.
- All recorded marriages of divorced persons should have a copy of the consent appended to the records or readily available.
- Please have the worship register available.
- The names of people confirmed and received that day should be entered with all information complete.

Meeting with Vestry

- If possible, I would like to meet with your vestry for about 30-60 minutes as part of your regularly scheduled monthly meeting **before or after** the visitation. Please work with Sarah to schedule this.
- At the vestry meeting, I would like to discuss how things are going and what concerns you have. What might the diocese do to support your work?

Hospitality/Q&A

I encourage your community to offer simple hospitality following worship. If desired, we can use the time for a Q&A. I would like to take the Rector and their family, and/or other priest or deacon for lunch after the service, my treat!

Parking

There is no need to save a parking place for me, but please tell me what is available, a parking lot or street parking rules.

Visitation Checklist

6 Weeks Before

- **Visitation Planning Form:** The online visitation planning form must be submitted **[6] weeks prior** to the visitation.
<https://www.cognitofrms.com/EpiscopalDioceseOfRochester1/PLANNINGFORAVISITATION>
 - Please let me know if there is anything significant that I should be aware of, or something specific you'd wish me to address during my visit.
 - Use this form to submit names for Baptism/Confirmation/Reception certificates.
- **Schedule Visitation Planning Zoom:** In preparation for my visitation, I prefer to have a zoom meeting with the priest, or warden, **[2] weeks prior** to a scheduled visitation to review the broad outline. Please contact Sarah to make an appointment.

1 Week Before

- **Bulletin:** Email to Sarah at least **[1] week** prior to visitation, a draft is acceptable.
- If chrism oil is needed, must notify office

During Visitation

- **Person assigned to be photographer:** During the visit, please arrange for someone in the parish to take a few group photos with the bishop, and email photos to Steve Richards.
- **Records:** Parish and Service Registers made available for review.

After Visitation

- **Email Photos:** Email group shots from the visit to Steve Richards, steve@episcopaldioceseofrochester.org