



## Bishop Visitation Customary

*The Episcopal Diocese of Missouri*

The Rt. Rev. Deon K. Johnson  
*Eleventh Bishop of Missouri*

I very much look forward to spending time with you and your community of faith as we begin to minister in Christ's name together. My goal is to spend significant time with every one of our worshipping communities in my first year serving alongside you here in the Diocese of Missouri. Visitations are an opportunity for us to live more fully into the understanding that we are "one Church in many locations serving Christ together."

Being new to the diocese, I have much to learn from you and your community of faith. I envision our visits as an opportunity for mutual discovery and learning as we seek to discern God's desire for the Diocese of Missouri. I have had some opportunity to visit both virtually and in-person with many of our communities of faith and I have found those visits to be extremely life-giving, invigorating, and fun.

I am eager to continue to get to know you and to share your stories that capture your hopes and dreams, while acknowledging your anxieties and disappointments. Knowing our strengths while acknowledging our fears allows us to move further forward into God's purpose for our lives, the life of the Church, and the life of the world.

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, Jillian Smith ([jsmith@diocesemo.org](mailto:jsmith@diocesemo.org)), 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 12- to 15-month time period.

I look forward to being with you and your community of faith!

Yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Deon K. Johnson", with a small cross symbol above the first letter of the first name.

The Rt. Rev. Deon K. Johnson

## INTRODUCTION

This customary is designed to help in the planning of the Bishop’s visit to the communities of faith in the Diocese of Missouri. In preparation for an Episcopal visitation, please contact the Bishop’s Office with any questions or special requests. The Bishop’s Office is **your** resource. The Bishop and Bishop’s staff are here to help you and your community of faith. The regular pastoral visitation of all worshipping communities<sup>1</sup> of the diocese is among the principal responsibilities of the bishop’s ministry. It is also one of the great delights of the episcopal office!

The intention is that the visitation is to be as useful and productive as possible. 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 community of faith.

I love to see you and hear about community engagement, initiatives, projects and ongoing ministries within your local context. You may also choose to review your challenges and accomplishments. While any time is the right time to ask for advice or discussion, visitations provide a great opportunity for the Bishop and other members of the Bishop’s staff to respond to context-specific questions face-to-face.

On occasion, prior to or during a visitation, members of the Bishop’s staff may make arrangements to meet either via teleconference or in-person with members of the worshipping community.

If there is more time needed than is possible on a day of the planned visitation, please ask for time with me or a member of my staff on another occasion. With the advent of video conferencing I can, for instance, attend a vestry meeting close to a visitation, plan for a virtual “town hall” with the worshipping community members or lead an in-person or online retreat with the parish leadership that culminates in a Sunday visitation. We have options!

## CONTAINED IN THIS DOCUMENT

<i>The Day of Visitation</i>	<i>Page 2</i>	<i>Meeting with Candidates</i>	<i>Page 4</i>
<i>Parking</i>	<i>Page 2</i>	<i>Families &amp; Sponsors</i>	<i>Page 4</i>
<i>The Role of Deacons</i>	<i>Page 2</i>	<i>Prayer Books &amp; Certificates</i>	<i>Page 5</i>
<i>Social Media</i>	<i>Page 2</i>	<i>Reviewing Registers</i>	<i>Page 5</i>
<i>Formation &amp; Teaching</i>	<i>Page 3</i>	<i>Baptisms</i>	<i>Page 5</i>
<i>The Liturgy of the Day</i>	<i>Page 3</i>	<i>The Use of Oils</i>	<i>Page 5</i>
<i>Liturgical Readings &amp; Colors</i>	<i>Page 3</i>	<i>Standing or Kneeling</i>	<i>Page 5</i>
<i>Liturgical Singing</i>	<i>Page 4</i>	<i>A Few Comments</i>	<i>Page 5</i>
<i>Sharing a Meal</i>	<i>Page 4</i>	<i>Questions &amp; Information</i>	<i>Page 6</i>
<i>Discretionary Envelopes</i>	<i>Page 4</i>	<i>Revised Baptismal Covenant</i>	<i>Page 7</i>

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<sup>1</sup> Please note that I use the term “Community of Faith” or “worshipping community” instead of congregation since there are other communities within the Diocese of Missouri that are a part of my regular visitation including Deaconess Ann House, Rockwell House Campus Ministry, etc.

## **THE DAY OF THE VISITATION**

I will make every effort to arrive no less than 30 minutes before the first service. One or more members of my staff may be joining me for the visitation. My family may occasionally travel with me on a visitation.

In general, it is my desire to maintain the Sunday morning schedule of the parish and attend the liturgies as commonly experienced. In some cases, it may be desired to merge the worship times together for one service and there is perhaps no better time than the Bishop's visitation. This also means there is more time to be flexible with adult forums, meetings with youth and children, spending time with the Vestry, meeting with confirmands, etc. If a worship time change for the visitation is desired that should be made known well in advance.

## **PARKING**

I will generally arrive early for a visitation. If arriving early (30-60 minutes prior to the first service) means that I should not have a problem getting a parking space relatively close, there is no need to reserve a spot. However, if you feel the lot may be full, or has limited spots, or it is a special service where many may be attending, and I may be arriving later, it is probably advisable to reserve a spot as near to where the clergy will vest as possible. Bishops bring a lot of gear!

## **THE ROLE OF DEACONS**

The Book of Common Prayer clearly establishes three distinct functions of a deacon in the liturgy:

- Proclamation of the Gospel
- Preparation of the Eucharistic Table
- The Dismissal

In addition, the Book of Common Prayer includes additional functions of a deacon in the liturgy:

- Bidding the Confession
- Bidding the Creed
- Bidding the Prayers of the People

If there is a deacon in a worshipping community or the Archdeacon accompanies me as part of the visitation, the deacon should carry out these functions.

*(Please refer to the Diocesan Deacon's customary for additional information.)*

## **SOCIAL MEDIA**

As you may know, I enjoy taking selfies and photos with members of the parish, clergy, etc. and highlighting the worshipping community using social media. Use of social media to communicate about the day is encouraged. Live tweeting or Facebook posting/checking-in on the day of the visitation are encouraged.

Following my visit, I would encourage your community of faith to be in contact with Janis Greenbaum (Jgreenbaum@diocesemo.org) to do a “Diocesan Social Media Takeover” – a fun opportunity for your parish. The idea is to give the rest of the diocese a sense of what a “week in the life” is like for your church, beginning with the Bishop’s visit.

Share a bit about “who you are” including your church’s name and location. Something like, “This week St. Swithun’s Episcopal Church in Yourtown, Missouri is taking over the diocesan social media account. We’re so excited to show you what life is like here!” Feel free to submit 3-4 posts including photos and short explanations. You might show us your parish ministries, your worship services, the way congregants are engaged in mission in the community outside church walls, or perhaps some good vestry meeting selfies -- whatever is going on in your community this week that helps us get to know you.

Please do not share photos of minors without a signed release from parents or guardians. It is my assumption that every parish has photo release forms on file for children. If you need forms please let my office know so that we can provide you a template.

### **FORMATION & TEACHING**

I enjoy teaching and I am happy to meet with any configuration of parishioners for a time of formation. We can have an open forum; I, or a staff member, can do a presentation on a number of subjects; and I can also simply use the time to enjoy fellowship with members of the parish.

During my visitation it will be my desire to meet with the clergy, wardens and vestry following the final liturgy and coffee hour/reception or at time that is convenient for the parish leadership.

### **THE LITURGY OF THE DAY**

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 your community of faith.

When there are no baptisms, confirmations, or receptions, the liturgy on the day of the bishop’s visitation should include the renewal of baptismal vows. This should be substituted for the Nicene Creed at all services, even those that are otherwise Rite I.

### **LITURGICAL READINGS AND COLORS**

The Proper of the Day will be used, even when initiation rites are to take place. Patronal feasts that fall on or close to the visitation may take precedent over the Proper of the Day.

The Revised Common Lectionary (Episcopal Edition) is the norm in the Diocese of Missouri. If it seems appropriate to use other readings, please clear it with me well in advance of the visitation.

The color of the day for confirmations, receptions, and reaffirmations 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.

### **SINGING**

I am more than happy to chant/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 chanted/sung.

### **SHARING A MEAL**

Ours is a faith tradition centered around breaking bread together. Sharing a meal or refreshments is something I enjoy since it allows me to engage with members of the community of faith in a more relaxed setting.

I am happy to be a part of your typical coffee hour, a gathering celebrating those who may have been baptized, confirmed or received that morning, or even a meal with the leadership of your community. Please know there is no need to make extra-ordinary arrangements because I am with you. If however, my presence would be a good excuse to have a party, then I am happy to be the impetus for any form of celebration.

***\*\*\*Please note that I am allergic to shellfish!\*\*\****

### **DISCRETIONARY ENVELOPES**

It is the customary when the bishop visits to provide envelopes for contributions to the Bishop's Discretionary Fund. When working on details with Jillian, please let her know if you need them provided. I am deeply grateful for the generosity of our communities of faith, 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 spending time in conversation with those being baptized, confirmed, received, or reaffirmed prior to the liturgy. 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 prior may be preferable.

### **PARTICIPATION OF FAMILY AND SPONSORS**

It is a local decision as to whether candidates sit together or with their families. Families 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 Holy 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.

### **REVIEWING REGISTERS**

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

### **BAPTISMS**

Baptism is considered full initiation into the Body of Christ, the Church. Baptism is our primal sacrament and as such the symbolism of water is vitally important to the rite. The Book of Common Prayer places full immersion as the preferred method of baptism in the Episcopal Church. I love the use of lots of water. The baptismal candidate should get wet!

I prefer the deacon or priest do the water bath, and I, will do the chrismation.

### **THE USE OF OIL**

I love lots of oil – for baptism, 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 am happy to consecrate oil during my visitation. If there are baptisms, the consecration comes before the blessing of water. If there are no baptisms the consecration takes place following the post communion prayer.

### **STANDING OR KNEELING**

The Bishop lays hands on 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:**

Confirmation is for children or adults 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.

#### **QUESTIONS & ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

Please contact Jillian Smith, my Executive Assistant, who would be happy to assist you:

**EMAIL:**            [jsmith@diocesemo.org](mailto:jsmith@diocesemo.org)  
**PHONE:**        314-231-1220 ext. 1370  
**MAIL:**            1210 Locust Street, St. Louis MO 63103

## **APPENDIX: A REVISED VERSION OF THE BAPTISMAL COVENANT**

*The following is an alternate version of the Baptismal Covenant that may be used within the Diocese of Missouri. No community of faith is compelled to use this form; it is simply offered as an option for use.*

*Presider* Let us renew our commitment to Christ. *Silence is kept for a time.*

Do you reaffirm your renunciation of evil and renew your commitment to Jesus Christ?

*People* ***I do.***

*Presider* Do you believe in God the Father?

*People* ***I believe in God, the Father Almighty, creator of heaven and earth.***

*Presider* Do you believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God?

*People* ***I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord. He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary. He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried. He descended to the dead. On the third day he rose again. He ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again to judge the living and the dead.***

*Presider* Do you believe in God the Holy Spirit?

*People* ***I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting.***

*Presider* How will you connect to Christ in community?

*People* ***With God's help I will continue in the apostles' teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in the prayers.***

*Presider* How will you resist evil and turn to Christ?

*People* ***With God's help I will persevere in resisting evil, and, whenever I fall into sin, repent and return to the Lord.***

*Presider* How will you show Christ in your life?

*People* ***With God's help I will proclaim by word and example the Good News of God found in Jesus Christ.***

*Presider* How will you seek and serve Christ in your life?

*People* ***With God's help I will seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving my neighbor as myself.***

*Presider* How will you work for the reign of Christ?

*People* ***With God's help I will strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being.***

*Presider* May Christ dwell in your hearts through faith, that you may be rooted and grounded in love and bring forth the fruit of the Spirit. ***Amen.***