



DIOCESE OF EAST ANGLIA

Diocesan policy on BISHOP'S VISITATION TO PARISHES

Code of Canon Law

'The Bishop is bound to visit his diocese in whole or in part each year, so that at least every five years he will have visited the whole diocese, either personally or, if he is lawfully impeded, through the coadjutor or auxiliary Bishop, the Vicar General, an Episcopal Vicar or some other priest' (*Canon 396 # 1*)

'The Bishop is to endeavour to make his pastoral visitation with due diligence. He is to ensure that he is not a burden to anyone on the ground of undue expense.' (*Canon 398*)

cf. Directory for the Pastoral Ministry of Bishops (2004), nos. 220-224

Every five years

1. The Bishop aims to carry out a formal visitation of each parish in the diocese every five years. This involves 11 visitations each year (there are currently 55 parishes).
2. The Bishop will therefore be less available for other weekend events. Deans and parish priests are advised to consider weekday evenings when possible for Confirmations and other special celebrations.

Dean's preparatory visit

3. In preparation for the Bishop's pastoral visit, the local Dean will visit the parish up to three months beforehand. Shortly before the visitation, the parish priest will receive a questionnaire which will serve as a check on canonical observance, administrative detail and pastoral progress. This should be completed in consultation with any assistant priest and deacon, and returned to the dean in good time before the visit. The actual visitation provides an opportunity to discuss the pastoral activity of the parish, the welfare of the clergy, and any particular challenges and difficulties.

The Dean is to ensure that all parish registers are correctly entered and securely kept, including the register of Mass Offerings. The Dean will discuss any concerns there may be about the administration and upkeep of parish property. A special focus for the Dean's visit will be the Quinquennial Report, so as to ensure that the recommendations have been acted upon effectively; the Diocesan Financial Administrator can provide the Dean with the main points to be checked.

The Dean will send a written report on his visit to both the Bishop and the parish priest before the Bishop's visitation.

When the Dean himself is the parish priest of the parish to be visited, the Bishop will appoint another Dean to carry out the preparatory visit.

Focus on the Bishop's pastoral visit

4. The Bishop's visitation should not coincide with any major celebration in the parish, such as Confirmations, First Communions, etc. The focus throughout the weekend should be on the Bishop's pastoral visit. This can be difficult when there is another celebration to organise.

Visitation Programme

5. The usual programme for the Bishop's visitation will be as follows:

In most cases and health-permitting, the Bishop will arrive at an agreed time on Saturday afternoon, stay the night in the presbytery, and leave after lunch on Sunday unless there is a Sunday evening Mass.

During the visitation, the Bishop will spend about 45 minutes with each priest and deacon in the parish, including those who are retired or sick (ideally visiting them in their homes when they live elsewhere than the presbytery). The Bishop will also spend time with any Lay Pastoral Assistant, Administrator, etc. These meetings should be arranged by the parish priest in advance. A short break between each appointment would be appreciated.

Later on Saturday, perhaps after any Vigil Mass, or even on Sunday morning, all parishioners are to be invited to a meeting with the Bishop. This meeting will include an address by the Bishop on a topic he thinks appropriate, followed by an opportunity for any questions and an open discussion. This should be followed by a simple social of some kind (even if only a glass of wine and 'nibbles').

The Bishop will celebrate and preach at the three main Masses in the parish, whether in the parish church or in other churches or Mass centres. If there are further Masses at which the timetable allows him to be present, the Bishop will simply preach at those Masses and be available to greet the people afterwards: he will not 'preside'.

If time allows, the Bishop will visit any religious community, and some of the sick and housebound of the parish. This should be arranged in advance by the parish priest.

If possible, it would be good to invite to either Saturday or Sunday lunch all priests and deacons in the parish (along with the wives of married clergy).

Nothing else (e.g. Confessions etc) should be included in the programme.

6. A copy of the proposed timetable for the visitation should be sent by the parish priest to the Bishop well in advance.
7. A key consideration throughout each visitation will be progress in the implementation of the Diocesan Pastoral Plan.
8. The Bishop will produce a written report on his visitation, and send copies to the parish clergy and the local Dean. It is intended for duplication and wide distribution in the parish.

Other parish visits by the Bishop

9. The Bishop's formal pastoral visit to a parish every five years is only one of many forms of visit. He will continue to visit parishes at other times for the Sacrament of Confirmation, and for other special celebrations.
10. The Bishop will visit the Catholic schools of the diocese, as well as local prisons and hospitals, separately from the formal visitations of parishes.
11. In addition to his parish visitation, the Bishop hopes to be able to visit religious communities also on other occasions.

'The pastoral visit is one of the ways, confirmed by centuries of experience, through which the Bishop maintains personal contact with the clergy and with other members of the People of God. It is an occasion to rejuvenate the energies of those engaged in evangelisation, to praise, encourage and reassure them. It is also an opportunity to invite the faithful to a renewal of Christian life and to an ever more intense apostolic activity. The pastoral visit helps the Bishop to evaluate the effectiveness of the structures and agencies designed for pastoral service, taking account of the circumstances and difficulties of the task of evangelisation, so as to determine more accurately the priorities and the means required for overall pastoral provision.'
(*Directory for the Pastoral Ministry of Bishops* (2004) no. 220)

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