



Vergers Standard Customary

for a Bishop's Visit

Diocese of Atlanta

Introduction:

The bishop's pastoral visitation to a parish or worshipping community becomes a special occasion in the life of the parish. Prior to any bishop's visit, his/her Customary for Pastoral Visitations is sent from the bishop's office to the rector or priest in charge. It behooves the vergers to obtain a copy and become familiar with its contents. For the Diocese of Atlanta, this Customary may be downloaded from the Diocesan Web Site at:

[https://www.episcopalatlanta.org/Content/www/CMS/files/The Customary for Bishops Visitations 2014.pdf](https://www.episcopalatlanta.org/Content/www/CMS/files/The_Customary_for_Bishops_Visitations_2014.pdf)

This Customary offers suggestions for a vergers when a bishop visits his/her parish. Prior to any visit by a bishop, the vergers is to be knowledgeable and experienced about the service for which the bishop is to preside. The personality and theology of the bishop, time, physical space, service, local customs and other factors will affect the actual execution of the vergers's duties. If there is one overriding rule it is this: **The bishop is a bishop; her/his wishes trump all others.**

Addressing the bishop, particularly when you are both vested, it should always be done with reverence and professional respect. Properly, "Bishop (Last Name)" or "Your Grace" should be used to address or refer to a bishop. You are serving as her/his butler, addressing the bishop by his/her first name, even when she/he has given you permission to do so, may not seem appropriate.

The vergers for which this Customary is written will be the "bishop's vergers" or the bishop's butler. It is recommended that a second vergers or senior acolyte be available to handle all other details of the liturgy which do not directly affect the bishop or her/his visitation.

Although many parishioners and guests want to talk with her/him, and many bishops make themselves available, the bishop's time is limited and you are responsible for having him/her in place when required. If necessary to extract the bishop from conversations with others, do so with grace and as discreetly as possible. As his/her vergers, you are bound absolutely and unequivocally to confidentiality; you are not to repeat any comment or conversation you might overhear nor are you to report anything you might have seen unless specifically requested or directed by the bishop.

A bishop's vergers is to be thoroughly prepared and knowledgeable and conversant with the liturgy as written in the Book of Common Prayer, including the rubrics, so that you are not fumbling. If the bishop steps outside of the documented liturgy – just go with the flow.

Initial Tasks:

Arrive at the church and vest 60-90 minutes prior to the start of the service. As with any service, check with the rector for any last minute changes. Know who are the service participants (including the altar guild and all acolytes, thurifer, lectors, eucharistic ministers, clergy, ordinands, confirmands, baptismal parties, etc.) If you need to make a list, do so in order to be able to introduce the participants to the bishop. While you do not need to perform formal introductions, reminders such as “Bishop *N.*, I know you remember so-and-so from your last visit” is always appreciated. Inquire and note any changes to the liturgy on several service leaflets, one for you and at least one for the bishop.

It is especially helpful when the bishop’s vergers places the service leaflet and other service documents in a loose leaf (3-ring) binder for use by the bishop. It is especially helpful to have the service bulletin in large print. Prior to the service, place this binder near the location where the bishop will be presiding. Have several additional service leaflets available to hand to the bishop when required throughout the service.

Place water discreetly throughout the chancel for the bishop and other members of the altar party. Particularly if the bishop is going to preach and/or chant at Eucharist, he/she will want and appreciate water.

Ask the rector if she/he needs assistance in making available the parish documents and books for the bishop’s review and be certain that any certificates are ready to be signed. It is the rector’s responsibility to inform the bishop that her/his signatures are required. However, the rector may delegate this responsibility to the vergers.

If it is the custom of your parish to provide a reserved parking space for the bishop, be certain to tell the office of the bishop so they will know in advance there is reserved parking. Have someone available to direct the bishop to that space. You or the person assigned should be in the parking lot when the bishop arrives and, if it is raining, have umbrellas ready for the bishop and others in the bishop’s party.

Greet the bishop upon arrival. You are serving as the representative of your parish. Always take his/her lead as to the greeting -- some hug, some kiss, others take your hand or place their hands on you for a blessing. At this point, you are the bishop’s butler until she/he leaves the parish property.

Assist the bishop with carrying her/his things into the vesting area and provide a brief summary of any pre-service activities. Inform the bishop if he/she will be signing certificates prior to the service and identify for him/her the location of the parish books. Place freshly brewed coffee and water near the vesting area. Inquire whether he/she would like to eat or have something else to drink prior to the service and provide what she/he needs.

Identify a “quiet space” he/she can use prior to the service or during her/his time at the parish. Inquire as to the chant tone and change the missal if needed before the service. If you need to leave the bishop, be sure to let the bishop know you are stepping away and when you will return.

If the bishop is accompanied by a deacon, or the parish has a deacon, the deacon will assume normal liturgical responsibilities during the liturgy, including caring for the bishop’s mitre, crozier, service book, etc. The deacon will normally be seated next to the bishop during the liturgy. Most deacons will be very grateful for the opportunity to share those responsibilities with you and perhaps even more grateful for instruction as to local parish customs.

Unpacking:

While the bishop begins meeting, greeting and signing books or certificates, the bishop's vergers is to unpack the bishop's vestments including her/his mitre and crozier. Place the mitre and crozier within your reach, with your verge should be fine. Both are your responsibility prior to the bishop requiring them. If you are unsure how to assemble the crozier, simply ask the bishop.

Place the crozier stand to the left of the bishop's chair if possible. If not, place it to the left or in a location that is nearby and easily accessible. The bishop will sit in the chair normally occupied by the Celebrant at your parish.

Mark the bishop's service binder appropriately. Place the bishop's sermon on the pulpit or in his/her service binder as she/he prefers.

Preparation:

It is the rector's responsibility to walk the bishop through the service when he/she is ready to do so. The rector may delegate this to the deacon or bishop's vergers. Whichever is the case, make sure you accompany them as they walk through the service to note any last minute changes.

Make yourself available to the bishop but do not hover, but be near enough to respond when he/she requires something. Remind him/her discreetly when it is 15 minutes before the service is scheduled to begin. Collect the mitre and crozier and stand nearby the bishop.

If the bishop asks the vergers to assist with the miter and crozier during preparation,

- Hold the crozier in your right hand with the crook facing you. This makes it easy to transfer the crozier to the bishop's left hand and it will be in the proper position
- Hold the miter in your left hand. If possible, hold the flat side of the miter facing the bishop with the tippets folded back toward you.

Entering Procession:

The bishop is normally the last person in the procession. Be attentive, the bishop may choose not to be last. When it is time to process, the bishop's vergers bows slightly to the bishop then joins in the procession. The bishop's vergers will lead the eucharistic party (preacher and ministers serving at the altar). Walk slowly and calmly. You may be aware that the bishop has stopped briefly – keep walking.

The entering procession is one time that you will not be able to keep the bishop in your sight and that is alright - most bishops know exactly what to do and they typically preside at liturgies in multiple parish settings every month, so the brief time when you are not available to her/him will be completely acceptable. When you reach the chancel, dispose of your verge, prepare to receive the crozier from the bishop, place the crozier in the stand and move out of the way. Sit near the bishop if possible.

The Liturgy:

The bishop's vergers should be available to the bishop at all times during the service. A bishop does not wear a mitre while praying, preaching, celebrating the Eucharist or at other times during the service, depending on the liturgy.

Bishop Wright normally removes his mitre during the Collect for Purity and does not wear it again until the post-Eucharist blessing. It is acceptable to take his mitre from him at a convenient point and place it on the altar.

Other bishops may wear their mitre during segments of The Liturgy of the Word and then either hand it to the vergers to hold or place it on their chair when not wearing it. Be attentive to his/her desires.

If the bishop is wearing his mitre at the time of the offertory hymn, ask if he/she would like to have it placed on the altar. (It should be noted that in parishes of the Anglo-Catholic persuasion, it is common to find a bishop's candle and a small crucifix on the altar as a symbol of the bishop's presence. In that case it might be less appropriate to also place the mitre on the altar.)

When receiving the mitre during the service, step up to the bishop and hold both hands out flat. Never rush taking the mitre from the bishop. After you take the mitre, slowly and quietly turn it so that the triangle is facing you with the open side to the bishop and turn the tippets back up onto the side facing up. When giving the mitre back to the bishop, place your hands on both sides of the mitre, holding it slightly open. When the bishop takes the mitre, he/she can then slip his/her thumbs inside and place it on his/her head.

During the Gospel, some bishops will hold the crozier. In that case, retrieve the crozier from the stand and hand it to the bishop during the sequence hymn. After the reading, return the crozier to its stand. The Bishop will require the crozier for the Absolution after the Confession.

If you are holding a book for the bishop, be sure to hold it as steadily as possible.

Offertory:

After the offertory sentences, the bishop will return to his/her seat, and if the crozier is not already there, place the crozier in its stand. Again, have water available; the bishop will be grateful for a cup at this time. When the Offertory Hymn begins, the bishop will move to the altar for Eucharist.

Communion:

The bishop's vergers will remain at his/her chair. Keep your eyes on the bishop in the event you are needed.

Post Communion:

Retrieve the bishop's crozier and mitre immediately following the post communion prayer. The bishop will take the mitre and crozier from you. After you have handed him/her these items, return to your chair for the blessing. After the bishop blesses the congregation, retrieve your verge.

Retiring Procession:

At the appropriate time, bow slightly to the bishop and join the procession. Make no extra or flamboyant motions.

In the Narthex:

Be prepared to take the bishop's mitre and crozier. Assign someone to take the bishop's vestments in the event he/she wants to stay in the narthex or reception area to greet parishioners. Ask if there is anything further you can do and, if not, retire.

After the Service:

Pack the bishop's mitre, crozier and vestments. Retrieve his/her sermon and service binder and pack them in the appropriate place. If the rector has asked you to do so, provide the parish books for the bishop's signature.

Assist the bishop in getting to his/her vehicle; carry his/her vestments, crozier, and other items as required. Return to the church, finish your other vergers' duties, remove your vestments and go home.