

# Canonical Visitation and Confirmation

## § 1. General Principles

**O**NE OF THE chief duties of a diocesan bishop is to know his clergy and people, to see that everything concerning the worship of God in his diocese is in order, to decide disputed matters, and correct any possible abuses. The opportunity for all this is his Canonical Visitation of churches, parishes and religious institutions.<sup>1</sup>

The Council of Trent explains the purpose of Canonical Visitation: "The chief object of all Visitations is to maintain right and orthodox doctrine, to drive out heresies, defend good and correct bad manners, to incite the people to religion, peace and innocence by homilies and warnings, to arrange all things according to the need of the place, time and occasion by the prudence of the Visitor, for the good of the people."<sup>2</sup>

The Ordinary should make the visitation himself, or (if he is legitimately prevented) by a delegate. There is no special law as to who this delegate shall be. The Ordinary may send any priest he chooses to appoint, his vicar general, a rural dean, or another. But, since in most countries the opportunity of the visitation is used for the administration of Confirmation, either the Ordinary will come himself or he will send an auxiliary bishop.

The Council of Trent desires the visitation to be made once a year, or (in the case of a large diocese) once every two years.<sup>3</sup> The Code of Canon Law says that the bishop is to visit yearly his diocese, either completely or in part, so that at least every five years he shall have visited the entire territory.<sup>4</sup> The Ordinary may, however, visit more often and at any time that he thinks fit.

All persons, places and objects belonging to the diocese are visited; that is, the clergy and Catholics who live in each parish, all churches and chapels, including the churches of regulars, as far as they do diocesan work. The Code says: "Persons, Catholic institutes, sacred things and places within the boundaries of the diocese, are subject to ordinary Episcopal visitation. The bishop may visit the members of religious institutes of pontifical right and their houses only in the cases stated by

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<sup>1</sup> 1983 C.I.C. 396-398.

<sup>2</sup> Conc. Trid. Sess. XXIV, de Reform, c. 3.

<sup>3</sup> Conc. Trid., Sess. XXIV, de Ref., c. 3.

<sup>4</sup> 1983 C.I.C. 396 § 1.

law."<sup>5</sup> The Ordinary also visits all convents of nuns, religious and pious institutions, such as schools, orphanages, almshouses and so on. He examines the objects of divine worship, the furniture of the church, vessels and vestments.

He inquires into the conduct of services, the administration of sacraments, administration of ecclesiastical property in all its forms. He examines the books of the parish, the register of baptisms, marriages, confirmations and funerals. He makes any inquiries that seem opportune to him concerning the life of the clergy and people. He allows the people an opportunity of speaking to him, that they may expose any question or make any complaint.

The entertainment of the bishop and those who accompany him and the travelling and other expenses are to be provided for in accordance with legitimate local usage.

The Ordinary may bring other co-visitors with him, to whom he delegates part of the duty.

Appeals against any decision made by the Ordinary in those matters which concern the object and end of the visitation are to be made in accordance with the norms of the 1983 C.I.C. The bishop must proceed, even at the time of the visitation, in accordance with law.

There are differences in the ceremony of visitation, according to whether it is made by the Ordinary or by his auxiliary bishop. There are further modifications according to the rank of the Ordinary. In the first place we consider the visitation of the church of the parish, next that of convents and institutions, lastly that of the churches of exempt regulars.<sup>6</sup>

## § 2. Before the Visitation

Notice of the visitation will be sent in due time to the rector of the church and he may be sent a questionnaire to answer about the affairs of his parish. In most cases the day and hour of the function are arranged by agreement with him, so that both may be convenient for the people who will attend and the candidates for Confirmation.

According to custom the visitation is announced to the people beforehand, generally on the Sunday before it takes place, if not earlier. Notice is given that the faithful will have an opportunity of seeing the bishop privately in the sacristy or other convenient place. The hymn *Veni Creator* is sung or recited, with the versicle *Emitte Spiritum tuum*, its

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 397 § 1-2. Cf. also 628 § 2-3.

<sup>6</sup> The ceremonies for Canonical Visitation are in the pontifical ("*Ordo ad visitandas parochias*" in Part III). There is a booklet entitled *Order of the Episcopal Visitation of Parishes, with the Rite of Confirmation* (Burns & Oates, 1931). It is an excerpt from the Roman Pontifical giving the prayers in Latin and English, with the rubrics in English.

response and the prayer *Deus qui corda fidelium*, after the chief Mass on the Sunday before the visitation.

### § 3. Visitation by the Ordinary

Supposing the Ordinary to be a bishop<sup>7</sup> the following are the ceremonies of his visitation.

The general order is always the same, namely, reception of the bishop at the doors of the church, procession to the altar, prayers for him, his blessing (possibly Mass), his sermon to the people, announcing the indulgence, prayers for the dead, visitation of the tabernacle and altar (possibly Benediction), Confirmation, visitation of the church and its furniture, of the sacristy (its vessels, Holy Oils, relics and vestments), the opportunity for the faithful to speak to the bishop, examination of the mission books and accounts, instructions to the clergy, last visit to the Blessed Sacrament.

In the details, the vestments worn and so on, greater or less solemnity may be used.<sup>8</sup> If the visitation takes place in the morning, either the bishop himself may say or sing Mass, or the rector of the church may do so in his presence. In this case the Mass is said after the bishop has given his blessing. His address to the people is normally made after the Gospel of the Mass.

**The Preparations.** The following preparations are made:

The church and high altar are decorated as for a feast. If Mass will be celebrated the altar is vested in the colour of the day; otherwise it is vested in white for the Benediction (if this should take place) and Confirmation. At the epistle corner of the altar, facing that corner, a pontifical (or other book) open at the prayers for the reception of the bishop is ready on the missal stand.<sup>9</sup> The pontifical canon—open at the form for a bishop's blessing—is placed at the centre of the altar, leaning against the tabernacle or cross. The altar cards are not put on.

At the door of the church a small carpet is laid, and on it a prie-dieu with a (green)<sup>10</sup> cushion is placed for the bishop. If there are not enough servers to make a procession to the door, a table must stand there, on the right just inside the door, on which are placed the incense boat, a crucifix (covered with a white veil) which the bishop will kiss, the vessel of lustral water and sprinkler.

In the sanctuary a carpet is laid before the altar steps. On it is a kneeling-stool covered with a cloth and with two cushions, one on which

<sup>7</sup> For the changes in the rite when he is an archbishop, see § 4 below.

<sup>8</sup> For example, in the more solemn form the bishop puts on amice, stole and cope (with morse) for the absolution and for the visitation of the tabernacle; in the simpler form he uses a stole only, worn over the rochet.

<sup>9</sup> With it a card containing the prayer of the titular of the church.

<sup>10</sup> Violet on a penitential day.

the bishop will kneel, the other on which he will rest his arms. The colour of this covering and the cushions is green for a bishop, red for a cardinal.

If Mass is not to be said, a faldstool (covered in white) or chair is placed on the footpace on the gospel side, where the bishop will sit while preaching.

On the ordinary credence are prepared: a white burse (containing a corporal), the tabernacle key, a white stole for the rector, the bell.

If Mass is to be celebrated by the bishop: on the credence, in addition, are made ready the chalice prepared for Mass, the bishop's maniple, and the cruets. Vestments (amice, alb, cincture, stole and chasuble) are prepared near the credence (they will later be transferred to the table of the altar).

If Mass is to be said in the bishop's presence, the cruets are made ready with the things on the credence; and the vestments and chalice for the celebrant are prepared in the sacristy. The missal and altar cards are ready near the altar.

At an extra credence (near the ordinary one) are laid out the special requisites for the bishop:<sup>11</sup> his mitres, the hand-candle, a small salver, the pontifical (Part III), a book for the absolution for the dead, the form for announcing the indulgence, a card or book containing the music of the *Confiteor*, if this is to be sung. Nearby (at the sedilia or other convenient place) are an amice, white stole, cope and morse for the bishop (stole only, if he will follow the simpler rite); a black stole, cope and simple morse (or stole only) for the absolution; a white humeral veil.

Aside in the sanctuary is a black cloth (or a catafalque) for the absolution for the dead.

If *Confirmation is to be administered* the following additional things are put on either credence: the *Pontificale*, Part I (or *Ritus Servandus*); the Chrism, a supply of cotton wool, the ewer and basin (with some lemon and dry bread) with towels, and a linen gremial veil (for which an amice serves). Nearby is the crosier.

In the sacristy: a white cope for the rector (if the rite will be the more solemn one), the aspersion, the thurible and boat, the processional cross, and a small crucifix on a salver and covered with a white veil.

For the bishop's visitation, towards the end of the function, the keys of the baptistery, of the aumbry for the Holy Oils, and of any reliquaries that are to be inspected, are at hand.

The vessels, vestments and furniture that the bishop will examine must be ready for this purpose; also whatever books he will see, either in the sacristy or the priest's house.

**Assistants.** All the clergy of the church go to the door to receive the bishop. There should also be a thurifer, cross-bearer and acolytes, two other servers to carry the holy water and crucifix, four servers to hold the

<sup>11</sup> Normally the pontifical ornaments and vessels, etc., will be brought by the bishop and arranged beforehand by his chaplain or by the MC.

book, candle, mitre and crosier (these last two wearing white *vimpæ*), torchbearers.<sup>12</sup> The rector of the church wears a surplice; or he may, for greater solemnity, go to the door in surplice, and white cope. He does not wear a stole.

The procession may go to the house where the bishop awaits it and conduct him thence to the church. Meanwhile the canticle *Benedictus* may be sung.

**Reception of the Bishop.** The bishop, with his chaplain, is usually received at the door of the church. The Ordinary wears rochet and mozzetta, or the cappa magna. The rector, clergy and servers go to meet him at the door.<sup>13</sup> The cross-bearer and acolytes stand on the left of the entrance, the thurifer, aspersion-bearer, and crucifix-bearer on the right. The rector holds the small crucifix for the bishop to kiss. Meanwhile the bishop, without biretta and skull-cap, kneels on the kneeling-stool there prepared. The bishop rises and resumes his skull-cap. The rector hands him the sprinkler, kissing it first, then the bishop's hand. The bishop sprinkles himself on the forehead with holy water, then sprinkles the rector and those who are around. All genuflect (except the cross-bearer and acolytes) and make the sign of the cross. The rector receives back the sprinkler. The thurifer kneels before the bishop, holding up the thurible. The rector takes the spoon and hands it (with the *solita oscula*), saying *Benedicite, Pater reverendissime* (to a cardinal *Benedicite, eminentissime ac reverendissime Pater*). The bishop puts on incense and blesses it (one sign of the cross). The thurifer rises; the rector takes the thurible and incenses the bishop (covered) with three double swings, bowing low before and after.

The procession now goes up the church. The thurifer goes first, then the cross-bearer between the acolytes, then the choir, servers, the bishop himself (uncovered),<sup>14</sup> his chaplain,<sup>15</sup> the rector of the church, then other clergy. If the bishop is in cappa his train is held by a server. As the bishop goes up the church he blesses the people, who kneel as he passes. Meanwhile the antiphon *Sacerdos et Pontifex*, or the responsory *Ecce Sacerdos magnus*, is sung or recited. Before going to the altar the bishop visits the chapel of the Blessed Sacrament (if there is one) and kneels there for a short period of silent prayer.

**Prayers for the Bishop.** Before the altar the bishop kneels at the faldstool. The cross and acolytes' candles are put aside in the usual place.

<sup>12</sup> If the bishop wears the cappa, a train-bearer will be needed.

<sup>13</sup> They may go in this order: The crucifix-bearer having on his left the thurifer, and on his right the aspersion-bearer. These are followed by the cross-bearer between the acolytes (with their candles). Then come the singers (if robed); next the servers; then the clergy and lastly the rector.

<sup>14</sup> The bishop is not paratus, and so the clergy process *seniores priores*.

<sup>15</sup> If he has co-visitors (in cassock and ferraiolo unless they are entitled to any special dress) they follow him.

The aspersory-bearer leaves the aspersory on the credence. The thurifer goes to the sacristy and makes ready the thurible for the absolution (unless Mass intervenes). All kneel, except the rector, who – if he is not already in cope – puts on a white stole and stands at the epistle corner of the altar (on the top step), facing the gospel side. He then sings or says the following versicles, the choir singing the answers, or the servers and congregation saying them:<sup>16</sup>

V. *Protector noster aspice Deus,*  
 R. *Et respice in faciem christi tui.*<sup>17</sup>  
 V. *Salvum fac servum tuum.*  
 R. *Deus meus, sperantem in te.*  
 V. *Mitte ei, Domine, auxilium de sancto,*  
 R. *Et de Sion tuere eum.*  
 V. *Nihil proficiat inimicus in eo.*  
 R. *Et filius iniquitatis non apponat nocere ei.*  
 V. *Domine, exaudi orationem meam,*  
 R. *Et clamor meus ad te veniat.*  
 V. *Dominus vobiscum.*  
 R. *Et cum spiritu tuo.*  
 Oremus.  
*Deus, humilium visitator, qui eos paterna dilectione consolaris, prætende societati nostræ gratiam tuam, ut per eos in quibus habitas tuum in nobis sentiamus adventum. Per Christum Dominum nostrum.*  
 R. *Amen.*

The rector takes off his cope if he has worn one, and his stole, and lays them aside.

The bishop goes up to the altar<sup>18</sup> and kisses it in the middle. He says or sings the prayer of the titular of the church (with the short conclusion), and then the form for his blessing, the clergy or choir answering:

V. *Sit nomen Domini benedictum.*  
 R. *Ex hoc nunc et usque in sæculum.*  
 V. *Adiutorium nostrum in nomine Domini,*  
 R. *Qui fecit cælum et terram.*  
*Benedicat vos omnipotens Deus, Pa✠ter et Fi✠lius et Spiritus ✠ Sanctus.*

<sup>16</sup> The text is given, since there may be difficulty in finding it. It is found in Part III of the Roman Pontifical.

<sup>17</sup> The "christus" is the (anointed) bishop. The prayer – *Deus humilium* – is sung in the second ferial tone.

<sup>18</sup> The *Pontificale* makes no special mention in the rite of Visitation of the singing by the choir of the antiphon, versicle and response of the titular of the church (from Lauds in the forenoon; from Vespers in the afternoon) and of his (her) prayer by the bishop, at the epistle corner. It does prescribe this at the reception of a Prelate, and some authors prescribe it here at the Visitation, as it is really the completion of the bishop's ceremonial reception.

R. Amen.

Meanwhile the rector and all in church kneel.

**Mass and Sermon.** If Mass is to be said, it follows now. If the bishop will say Mass, he is vested before the altar.<sup>19</sup> If it is to be said in his presence, the celebrant goes to the sacristy to vest. The bishop kneels at the kneeling-stool in the centre of the sanctuary or on the gospel side of it (unless there is a throne for him).

For the ceremonies of low Mass by a bishop see Chapter IX above. For low Mass in his presence see Chapter VIII.<sup>20</sup>

After the Gospel of the Mass the faldstool or a chair is placed on the footpace at the gospel side. The bishop sits there and addresses the people.<sup>21</sup> Meanwhile the celebrant sits at the sedilia. After the address the indulgence is announced, as below.

If Mass is not said, as soon as the bishop has given his blessing he sits on the faldstool or chair on the footpace and addresses the people. After the address a priest or server stands before him, below the altar steps, and (moderately bowed) sings or says the *Confiteor*. This may be done by the rector of the church. No change is made in the text of the *Confiteor*; but he who says it genuflects to the bishop as he says *tibi, pater* and *te, pater*. The bishop stands during the *Confiteor*, then sits for the announcement of the indulgence.

**The Indulgence.** The rector then, standing near the bishop, bows to him and reads the formula of indulgence, first in Latin, then in English:

For a BISHOP:

*Reverendissimus in Christo Pater et Dominus, Dominus N.<sup>22</sup> Dei et Apostolicæ Sedis gratia huius sanctæ N.<sup>23</sup> Ecclesiæ Episcopus, dat et concedit omnibus hic præsentibus indulgentiam plenariam suetis conditionibus lucrandam. Rogate Deum pro felici statu sanctissimi Domini nostri N.<sup>24</sup> divina providentia Papæ N.,<sup>25</sup> Dominationis suæ reverendissimæ et sanctæ Matris Ecclesiæ.*

*The Right Reverend Father and Lord in Christ, N. by the grace of God and of the Apostolic See, Bishop of this holy Church of N., gives and grants to all persons here present a plenary indulgence to be gained on the usual conditions.*

<sup>19</sup> While he reads the psalms of preparation at the prie-dieu the (second) MC arranges the vestments on the altar and servers prepare to bring them from there for the vesting.

<sup>20</sup> If solemn Mass is to be sung in his presence, or if he will himself sing solemn Mass the rules for these functions may be found above, Chapters XVI and XVII.

<sup>21</sup> Or the bishop may defer his address until after Mass. In either case it is after the homily that the indulgence will be imparted.

<sup>22</sup> The bishop's Christian name only.

<sup>23</sup> The Pope's name only (genitive).

<sup>24</sup> The name of the diocese in adjectival form (genitive singular).

<sup>25</sup> The Pope's number (genitive case).