

# A Customary for the Diocese of Mid-America



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# **A Customary for the Diocese of Mid-America (DMA)**

## **Introduction**

This Customary is offered to the Parishes and Clergy as a guideline for customs, policies, procedures, and appropriate behaviors in the Diocese of Mid-America. Most of the matters this Customary addresses have come from questions which were commonly asked throughout the 23 year existence of this Diocese. It was suggested that a written manual of those customs and practices would be helpful. It is offered to you by the Bishop Ordinary in the spirit of godly, pastoral advice and counsel. Please receive it in that light.

## **SECTION I: Matters Pertaining to the Clergy**

### **Clergy Information Forms:**

In the Bishop's role as Chief Pastor it is important that he have current personal and family information on all clergy of the Diocese. Prior to ordination or upon transfer into the Diocese of Mid-America clergy are required to complete this form and to periodically update this information upon request. Such forms will generally be requested on an annual basis at the same time as parish reports are requested.

### **Letters Dimissory:**

Transfer of canonical residency by Letters Dimissory as required by Title I, Canon 19, Sec. 6 of the Canons of the General Council (CGC) should be requested to be sent to a new diocese by clergy who move there, immediately after taking up residence and being received by their new Bishop. Generally, we receive such letters under the same conditions. However, both the issuance and acceptance of Letters Dimissory may be delayed by the Bishop for a proper cause under the Canons.

### **License to Officiate:**

A license to officiate in the Diocese may be requested from the Bishop by clergy living within this Diocese who are canonically resident in another Diocese, provided that they have first received a call to affiliate as an assistant Presbyter at one of the congregations of the Diocese of Mid-America, or who wish to be available as supply clergy. Such licenses are to be reviewed annually by the Bishop, and an annual activity report must be submitted to the Bishop by all licensed clergy prior to having their license renewed.

Transient or visiting Clergy of the Reformed Episcopal Church may be invited to preach or Officiate as allowed under the provisions of the Canons, as defined by this policy, provided that no person shall be allowed to so preach or officiate who would be ineligible for admittance as a postulant or candidate for Holy Orders, or ineligible for ordination under the Constitution and Canons of the General Council or of this Diocese.

## **Physical Examinations and Clergy Wellness:**

Clergy should practice good stewardship by setting the discipline of maintaining regular physical activity (exercise) by having physical examinations on a regular basis and by seeking proper medical and dental care as needed. In taking responsibility for their physical, spiritual and mental well-being, all clergy are to take time to be with their spouse and children. All clergy are to take at least one full day off from work each week, pursue healthy recreation or hobby interests, and take an annual vacation.

## **Vacation Policy:**

It is the policy of this Diocese that full-time clergy are entitled to a minimum of one month's vacation after their first calendar year's work and ministry. It is to be taken in consultation with the Vestry (or Bishop's Committee in the case of Vicars of missions). Should a Presbyter or Deacon leave their cure before completing a calendar year, usually they can expect only a pro-rata portion of their unused vacation to be paid.

## **Clergy Retreats, Synod, and General Council:**

Participation in Clergy Retreats such as Diocesan Clericus, Deanery meetings and other opportunities for spiritual renewal and development are strongly encouraged. The parish should make reasonable allowance for attendance of clerical retreats, which are not part of a Presbyter's vacation.

Each congregation is encouraged to budget an annual amount for any travel to and from Synod, as well as the General Council for all stipendiary presbyters, and to defray travel expenses as much as possible. Parishes may assist non-stipendiary clergy at their option. All Presbyters are expected to be in attendance for Diocesan Synod, unless excused by the Bishop for reasonable cause. Clergy who are not able to attend Diocesan Synod are expected to communicate with the Bishop Ordinary at least thirty days before Synod their reason(s) for inability to attend.

All clergy are encouraged to plan times for continuing education and to take sabbaticals when appropriate. Vestries are encouraged to plan for sabbaticals after seven years of service by a Rector or Vicar.

## **Assistant Clergy:**

The Bishop deems it a serious pastoral responsibility of his ministry to consult with the Rector and Vestry in this matter since assistant clergy become members of the diocesan family and are possibly eligible for a later move within the diocese. No presbyter or deacon is permitted to affiliate with a congregation of the Diocese as an assisting member of the clergy without the express permission of the Bishop. Assistant clergy called to serve and approved by the Bishop in a parish serve at the sufferance of the Rector and are deemed to offer their resignation to the Vestry upon the death retirement or resignation of the Rector.

## **Professional Ethics:**

The rights of the Rector or Vicar and common courtesy and the expected standards of behavior.

1. Whenever practical, diocesan presbyters and deacons planning to visit another parish should communicate that fact to the Rector or Vicar by phone or email in advance of the visit. The purpose is simply to allow the Rector or Vicar to be able to discuss potential participation (if desired by both parties), share some aspect of ministry with the congregation, or to provide for the option of fellowship in conjunction with the visit. In cases where this is not practical,

or where general invitations have been extended for gatherings such as Synod or other large scale or area wide programs or services, such communication is not expected. No visiting member of the clergy shall ever be required to participate in a service of worship.

2. Clergy who have previously served in a parish should be particularly circumspect in visiting or returning to their former parish, and should in *every* case contact the incumbent Rector or Vicar prior to such visit. Should a request be made by a parishioner to a former Rector/Vicar to perform a marriage, funeral, baptism, etc., permission must first be granted by the incumbent Rector/Vicar and such ministry is to be performed only at his invitation to do so. Such requests may be appropriate under certain pastoral circumstances, but must be left up to the discretion of the current Rector/Vicar.
3. Former clergy should avoid continuing with counseling or other relationships that might undermine the authority of the incumbent. Ordinary, long standing friendships may, of course be continued, but the former clergyman should be aware of the potential for harm and generally avoid becoming involved in the current life of the parish.
4. Clergy and Candidates for Holy Orders must generally maintain the highest level of morality and ethics in their personal and financial dealings, not only with parishioners, but in the community at large. This includes, but is not limited to the avoidance of conflicts of interest or the appearance of the same, using one's status to further personal gain (i.e. selling a product or service, borrowing money, or engaging in business or business investments, where there is a pastoral relationship). Any exception to the foregoing requires prior approval by the Ordinary. Nor shall Clergy or Candidate engage in activities or have association with groups or pastimes incompatible with the gospel.
5. The Clergy have a responsibility to the Bishop, as their chief pastor, to keep him apprised of serious financial or spiritual difficulties as they arise in their personal life, or the parish or mission in which they serve. This is not withstanding any duty that the Wardens or Vestry might have to keep the Bishop informed of such situations.
6. Clergy, in their ordination vows have sworn an oath before God to be "*diligent in prayer, and in the reading of Holy Scripture, and in such studies as help the knowledge of the same, laying aside the study of the world and the flesh.*" They should keep this in mind as they engage and spend their time on the internet. Participation in chat rooms and speculations on the internet not related to prayer and the study of Holy Scripture are unproductive in the fulfillment of this vow. Postulants are not permitted by the Bishop to participate in Chat rooms on the internet. They should be cultivating the discipline of devoting themselves to the study of Holy Scripture.

### **Standards of Sexual Morality:**

All members of the clergy of this Diocese are under obligation to model in their own lives the received teaching of the Church that all its members are to abstain from sexual relations outside of Holy Matrimony. The viewing of pornography or participation in any other form of unwholesomeness is not a conduct becoming of a faithful servant of Jesus Christ.

All clergy functioning within this Diocese should become familiar with the laws and receive training in the prevention of sexual harassment, adult sexual misconduct, and child sexual abuse and to be familiar with the Sexual Misconduct Policy of the Diocese. Copies are available from the Bishop's Office.

## **Clergy and Divorce:**

It is to be understood that when a member of the clergy is divorced, under circumstances that are detrimental to the well-being of the congregation, or are in violation of clerical behavioral standards articulated in the Constitution and Canons of the Reformed Episcopal Church, he must resign his cure and submit to the counsel and corrective discipline of the Bishop Ordinary. Determination of future clerical status shall be made by the Bishop with the concurrence of the Standing Committee.

Remarriage following divorce is not normally permitted for one who wishes to remain on active service in the Diocese of Mid-America unless the Bishop Ordinary waives this rule.

It is expected that when clergy experience marital difficulties, the Bishop Ordinary will not be the last to know, but will have sufficient opportunity to work with and counsel the clergyman and spouse so that divorce will not be the only option.

## **Clergy Supply Policies and Procedures:**

Due to the wide geographic distribution of the Diocese of Mid-America, parishes may compile their own list of supply clergy subject to the following rules of eligibility:

1. Only male clergy may preach, officiate, or celebrate at any time in the DMA. No exceptions.
2. Any REC presbyter in good standing and canonically resident in the DMA may so preside.
3. Any other REC presbyter in good standing, provided that he may only officiate or celebrate two Sundays in a six month period without the permission of the Ordinary or an officer of the DMA appointed by him to give such approval.
4. Any presbyter in good standing of the ACNA, or a church which is in communion with this church, subject to rule number 1, above, provided that he may only officiate or celebrate two Sundays in a six month period without the permission of the Ordinary or an officer of the DMA appointed by him to give such approval.
5. A presbyter in good standing of a church, not in communion with this church (e.g. The Episcopal Church, etc.), but who meets rule #1 above and has been specifically approved by the Ordinary or an officer of the DMA authorized to give such approval.
6. Any Bishop of the REC, *provided*, that no such Bishop shall perform any Episcopal (i.e. confirmation or ordination) act without the consent of the Bishop Ordinary, or if there is currently no Ordinary, without the consent of the Standing Committee of the DMA.
7. Any Bishop of the ACNA, or of a church in communion with the REC, *provided*, that no such Bishop shall perform any Episcopal (i.e. confirmation or ordination) act without the consent of the Bishop Ordinary, or if there is currently no Ordinary, without the consent of the Presiding Bishop of the REC.
8. Under ordinary circumstances, Deacons should not be used as supply if a Presbyter is available. Exceptions may be made by the bishop due to issues of geographic isolation, or in the case of mission works, or for the purpose of diaconal training for transitional deacons.

## **Compensation for Supply Clergy:**

The recommended minimum remuneration for supply clergy as of the 106<sup>th</sup> Synod is:

|  |        |
|--|--------|
| One principal Sunday Eucharist or Service..... | \$150. |
| Other Sunday Services (each).....              | \$75.  |
| Weekday Services (each).....                   | \$75.  |

Mileage is to be reimbursed at the standard rate per mile under current IRS rules and any other agreed travel expenses should be borne by the parish.

Supply clergy are expected to be given general information as to parish liturgical customs and shall respect the congregational customs and avoid innovations and deviations.

## **Interim Clergy:**

When there is a vacancy in any parish of the Diocese, the Bishop will assist the Vestry in engaging the services of interim clergy, to serve until such time as a new Rector is called. Any interim Presbyter-in-charge or interim Rector will serve with the understanding that he is not eligible for consideration as the new Rector unless the bishop waives this rule. While it is the day to day responsibility of the Vestry to engage interim or supply clergy, such clergy are to refrain from making liturgical or policy changes and are answerable for their conduct to the Ordinary and other officers appointed by him for the purpose of diocesan administration.

## **The Dress of the Clergy:**

Clergy must be ever mindful that their personal appearance while in the performance of official duties in public is not only a reflection upon themselves, but also upon their parishes, the Diocese and the Reformed Episcopal Church. Appropriate clerical attire, clean and pressed, shoes shined, etc. is expected of all clergy of the Diocese at all times for official parish, DMA and REC functions. Exceptions may be made for some administrative meetings, retreats, committee meetings, etc., or for events that are clearly casual in nature or that are primarily for sports and leisure time.

## **Vestments:**

### **1.) Non-Eucharistic Vesture:**

The surplice is the ordinary dress, worn over the cassock, for all services and ministrations, except in parishes where Eucharistic vestments are customarily worn.

The stole (outside of Sacramental use) is never properly worn by the clergy over the surplice as a mere decoration. It is worn when some occasion requires it. The stole is, therefore, appropriately worn over the surplice in the following circumstances:

- For Morning or Evening Prayer if a Eucharistic service is to immediately follow (i.e. without pause.)
- At Baptisms and Weddings (white)
- While hearing a formal confession and when anointing the sick in the church. (purple);
- By the Presbyters who assist the Bishop in laying on of hands in the ordination of Presbyters (red) designated by the Bishop;
- In administering Communion from the Reserved Sacrament to the sick in the church (white);
- When conducting a funeral (purple or white) as an option to the tippet.

**Note:** The stole is not by custom, worn for Morning or Evening Prayer. Instead, the tippet is worn together with the academic hood of any degree held by the clergyman unless the Holy Communion follows. The academic hood is never properly worn with a seasonal or colored stole.

It is recognized that there are long-standing traditions in a few parishes that do not conform to the above model (i.e. black gown or the custom of wearing the alb as a non-Eucharistic vestment). In such cases parishes may continue previous practices, but should consider greater uniformity with this customary. (Source of above usages: various editions of *The Parson's Handbook*.)

## **(2) Vestments for Holy Communion:**

Cassock, surplice, and stole of the season or occasion is the default standard of vestment in this Diocese. With the mutual and general consent of the Rector/Vicar and communicants of a parish (as communicated through the Parish Council), Eucharistic vestments may be worn by the clergy. When Eucharistic vestments are worn in this Diocese for the celebration of the Holy Eucharist, the following options exist according to local custom:

- Alb, cincture, and broad Eucharistic stole.
- Chasuble and Dalmatic and/or Tunicle over the appropriate stole.

The Presbyter who is to celebrate in formal Eucharistic vestments should wear a white alb, over which may be worn the girdle, stole, and chasuble. The amice and maniple may also be worn.

The Deacon wears the alb, girdle, stole (over left shoulder) and dalmatic. He may also wear the amice.

A clergyman vested as sub-deacon wears alb, girdle, stole and tunicle. A reader so vested omits the stole as he is not in orders.

Other clergy assisting should wear cassock, surplice and stole or alb and stole appropriate to their order and the customs of the parish.

When Morning Prayer immediately precedes the Eucharist, the colored stole may be worn over the alb. The chasuble should never be worn at Morning or Evening Prayer, but should be donned after the conclusion of Morning Prayer, or at the offertory.

## **(3) Other Vestments:**

The Cope is not, strictly speaking, a Eucharistic vestment and may be worn when appropriate on both Eucharistic and Non-Eucharistic (i.e. solemn Evensong, etc.) occasions.



SECTION II:  
**Lay Readers and other Lay Ministries**

**Licensed Lay Ministries:**

A confirmed male communicant in good standing may serve as a Lay Reader, Chalice Bearer, or Lay Communion Visitor, if licensed by the Bishop. In rare circumstances, a Lay Reader may be issued a license to preach. Guidelines for training and selection of such persons are contained in the Canons of the General Council. Seminary Students and Candidates for Ministry do not need a license to function in any of these ministries, subject to the supervision of the Rector/Vicar to which they are assigned, or to the seminary dean.

The Bishop will issue a license only at the request, and upon the recommendation, of the Rector or Vicar of the congregation in which the person will be serving. The license shall be issued for a period of time not to exceed three years and shall be revocable by the Bishop, or upon request of the Rector or Vicar in charge of the congregation.

**Lay Readers**

- (A) **A Licensed Lay Reader** is a male, age 21 or over, who regularly leads public worship in a congregation under the direction of a member of the clergy. A Lay Reader may not preach sermons of his own composition unless he is licensed to do so by the Bishop. A Lay Reader may also be licensed to administer the chalice, when such is requested by the Rector or Vicar. When there are enough vested clergy in the service, the clergy will administer the chalice regardless of how many readers are so licensed in the congregation.
- (B) Lay readers should be licensed according to Canon 24 of the Canons of the General Council and via such policies as are put in place by the Diocese of Mid-America. Licenses are currently renewed annually on the First Sunday in Advent. Lay Readers to be licensed should be submitted by the Presbyter to the diocesan office by the first week in November of each year.
- (C) In the performance of their duties, readers should be vested in black cassock and surplice for all liturgical services. At the daily offices, lay readers may wear the hood of their degree subject to the approval of the Rector and local parish custom.
- (D) At the Holy Communion readers may wear cassock and surplice, or they may wear an alb in lieu of the above.
- (E) When Eucharistic vestments are worn, a reader may wear the Tunicle of the Sub-Deacon, but not a deacon's stole.
- (F) Additionally, lay readers who are the officiant may wear the "blue" lay readers tippet at the daily office. No lay reader may wear a clerical collar at any time.
- (G) **A Lay Preacher** is a Lay Reader, Seminary Student, or Candidate for Ministry who preaches sermons of his own composition on occasions of public worship with the approval of the Rector or Vicar. Both training and approval by the Bishop are required.
- (H) **A Lay Communion Visitor** is a Lay Reader who is licensed to take the consecrated sacrament from the Holy Eucharist on Sunday to members of the congregation who, by reason

of illness or infirmity, are unable to be present at the Celebration. Rectors who wish to use this ministry must carefully train such Visitors concerning this ministry.

### **Lectors and other Lay Ministries**

A **Lector** is a person who reads the lessons and leads the Prayers of the People. This ministry does not require a Diocesan license. They should, however, be commissioned for this ministry by the Rector of the congregation in which they function.

### **Acolytes:**

Activities of acolytes are to be handled by the Parishes and Missions. Proper training and instruction of all acolytes are the responsibility of the Rector or Vicar. Acolytes may be vested in alb or in cassock and cotta.

### **Choirs:**

There is a preference for surpliced choirs in this diocese, meaning cassock and surplice or cotta. However, parishes using other choir vestments may do so according to custom, but are urged to avoid “garish” or other “worldly” styles and colors that detract focus from the centrality of the altar and those who serve there.

## SECTION III: **Sacraments and Rites of the Church**

### **Admission the Holy Communion:**

The historic position of the Church has been that persons admitted to the Holy Communion should be Confirmed by a Bishop in Communion with the REC or one who is deemed to be in the line of succession of the Historic Episcopate as understood by this Church. The following guidelines are provided to address the various situations that may occur in the administration of the Holy Communion.

### **Guest Communion:**

1. In the Reformed Episcopal Church any baptized person (a visitor) who has been baptized in the Name of the Holy Trinity and is in good standing in his/her own church may receive the Sacrament in our Church in accordance with the Book of Common Prayer.
2. The habitual reception of the Sacrament by persons who are not affiliated with the Reformed Episcopal Church is an indication for a pastoral invitation to Confirmation or Reception.
3. If a printed bulletin announcement is desired, the following words are recommended :

The following invitation is made to all those who are baptized in the Name of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost: “Our fellow Christians of other branches of Christ's Church, and all who love our Divine Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ in sincerity, are affectionately invited to the Lord's Table.”

### **Paedo-Communion:**

The following pastoral guidelines should apply to baptized children regarding admission to the Holy Communion with the goal that through proper teaching and practice they may grow in appreciation of the grace they have received and in their ability to respond in faith, love, and

thankful commitment of their lives to God. In all cases the priest shall ensure that the administration of communion of young children shall be conducted with decency and propriety.

1. That the reception of communion by young children should normally be in the context of their participation with their parents and other family members in the liturgy of the Church;
2. That pastoral sensitivity is always required: in not forcing the sacrament on an unwilling child, in not rejecting a baptized child who is reaching out for communion with God in Christ, and in respecting the position of the parents in this regard.
3. The Bishop recommends that children, under the age of 5 years, should receive the cup by Intinction. The children should be taught to hold the bread in their hand until the server comes with the cup, at which time, it shall be dipped in the wine and placed in the child's mouth.
4. That the practice of some parishes which customarily give first communion only to those who have been confirmed is seen to be acceptable practice, provided that children already admitted to the Holy Communion in another parish or jurisdiction should not be denied the sacrament.
5. In all cases, Reformed Episcopalians visiting parishes which are not their own should be willing to abide by the local parish customs.

#### **Intinction:**

Intinction may be offered within this Diocese, but in all cases the cup must also be offered to both clergy and laity. Intinction is intended as a mode of communication to be used in cases of communicable diseases, infirmity, to young children, etc. Exceptions may be made during times of epidemic, etc. Ancient custom, the Articles of Religion, and Scripture would indicate reception in both kinds as normative.

#### **Baptism:**

Except in emergencies, the Sacrament of Holy Baptism should be administered at the chief service on a Sunday or other major feast day. Holy Baptism is especially appropriate at the Easter Vigil, on the Day of Pentecost, on All Saints' Day or the Sunday after All Saints' Day, and on the Feast of Baptism of our Lord (the First Sunday after the Epiphany).

Each person to be baptized is to be sponsored by one or more baptized persons, who are themselves practicing Christian believers who are active members of the Church. It is the required duty of the clergy to provide adequate pre-baptismal instruction to all sponsors, parents, and mature candidates.

In the baptism of infants and children, it is the Bishop's expectation that at least one of the parents will be an active communicant member of the congregation where the baptism is to take place. In certain pastoral situations where this is not the case, the bishop expects that the sponsors will be communicant members of the parish, can fulfill the promises made in the baptismal office, and parents have given permission. As a norm, active participation in the life of the Christian community is expected of all parties involved, both before and after the baptism.

*(Note the rubrics on page 469 of the REC Book of Common Prayer (2003), and on page 273 of the 1928 BCP. Also note that Baptismal Certificates may be used as legal documents. They must include full name, date of birth, place of birth, both parents' full names as they appear on their birth certificates, sponsor's names, as well as the date and place of the baptism and signature of the officiant.)*

## **Confirmation:**

Confirmation is a significant event in the spiritual life of one making a public renewal and ratification of his or her baptismal vows. It is a time of empowerment and commissioning, when one receives the apostolic laying-on-of-hands. Candidates for confirmation must be properly instructed in the Christian faith and life, repentant of their sins, and duly prepared to make a mature, public commitment to following Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. Though the minimum age for youth confirmations may vary somewhat for certain pastoral situations, presentation for confirmation of children younger than eleven years of age requires the prior approval of the Bishop.

Persons already confirmed, but not in a church with Anglican polity, may be received by the Bishop, following the appropriate instruction and preparation, using the form for “The Admission of a Communicant” found in the *Book of Occasional Services (2011)*.

Any member of the Reformed Episcopal Church who has lapsed from active participation in the life of the Church, or who for some other appropriate reason wishes to do so, may make a public re-affirmation in the presence of the Bishop at the time of his visitation.

Confirmation, Reception and Reaffirmation of Baptismal Vows are three different, distinct categories of persons to be presented to the Bishop at the time of his annual visitation. In this Diocese, we continue to use the three different categories as traditionally understood in the practice of classical Anglicanism. Confirmation is for those who have been baptized, but have never received the laying on of hands by a Bishop in apostolic (historic) succession. Reception is for those who have been baptized and confirmed in another church of apostolic (historic) succession, (Episcopal, Roman Catholic, or Orthodox churches), and now wish to be received into the Reformed Episcopal Church/Anglican Church in North America. Reaffirmation is for Reformed Episcopalians who wish to reaffirm their vows previously made at baptism and confirmation. At confirmation, the traditional laying on of hands by this Bishop is used. At reception and reaffirmation, it is not; a blessing is given instead. Only those confirmed or received are to be entered into your parish register in the "Confirmation" and “Communicant” section. Please make these distinctions clear as you present your candidates to the bishop. It is the responsibility of the Rector or Presbyter-in-charge to submit the full names of Confirmands and/or candidates for Reception to the Diocesan office at least 10 days prior to the Bishop’s visit so that the appropriate certificates may be prepared.

## **Marriage:**

The Presbyter is in charge, not only of the marriage service, but also of the decoration of the church and the choice of music. No wedding date may be set without the concurrence of the Presbyter in charge of the parish in which the wedding is to be held. Marriages are expected to be celebrated in the church as a service of worship and not as private affairs or social spectacles. It is recommended that no marriage is to be celebrated during Advent or Lent, except for special or unusual reasons. In such cases, it is customary to consult with the Bishop before proceeding. The clergy are required to provide careful preparation and instruction to the couple prior to the solemnization of any marriage. For this reason, the officiating Presbyter must be contacted at least sixty days prior to the anticipated date of the proposed wedding.

Every congregation is expected to have clear and precise policies regarding marriages and the use of the Parish Hall for receptions. Matters to be addressed include the use of flowers, candles, photographers, videos, music, rehearsals, fees, etc.

It is the normal practice of this Diocese to celebrate all services of Holy Matrimony within the parish church building. Any Marriage conducted outside the confines of the parish building shall maintain and convey the worship and dignity of this sacramental rite always using the Book of Common Prayer as the standard for such unions.

Marriages of communicant members of the Church may be celebrated in the context of the Holy Communion. In such cases all communicants, or persons in good standing in their home church or denomination, are to be given opportunity to receive the Blessed Sacrament during the Communion of the people.

### **Re-marriage in the Church**

All marriages shall be conducted under the requirements of Canon 34 CGC.

A petition to the Bishop is necessary when either or both parties have been previously married and when the former spouse is still living. The Church is not a business for marrying people, and only those who are part of the Christian community or those who are seeking to become part of it should be considered. A petition is something that seeks a decision. Certain information is necessary on which to base that decision. The pastoral relationship established between the Presbyter and those coming to him seeking permission to marry in the Church is essential. The findings of the Presbyter are the most important parts of the petition upon which the decision is based. Therefore, thorough counseling and teaching are expected.

The information presented to the Bishop, along with the completed form of petition which is provided by the Bishop's office, must include:

1. A letter from the divorced person(s) indicating what went wrong in the previous marriage, whether counseling was sought, what positive insights or understandings were gained from the experience, why it is believed that the proposed marriage will be successful, what moral and financial responsibilities continue with respect to the former spouse and any children of that marriage, and the reason(s) the person wishes to be married in the Church.
2. A letter from the Presbyter indicating his opinion in the matter and his willingness to officiate at the marriage.

In all requests for the Bishop's consent to the marriage of divorced persons, applications must be in the hands of the Bishop at least 60 days before the marriage is contemplated, and no announcement of the marriage may be made until the consent of the Bishop has been received. Such applications will normally be considered by the Bishop only when the divorce has been final for at least one year.

### **Funerals:**

The Presbyter is in charge, not only of the funeral service, but also of the decoration of the church and the choice of music. Due consideration to the desires of the bereaved should be given in a pastoral, sensitive way. Funerals for communicant members of the Church should be taken from the Book of Common Prayer. When requested, Holy Communion may be offered as part of the service. In such cases, the invitation is to be extended and persons eligible to receive in their own church are to be welcomed to receive the Blessed Sacrament during the Communion of the people.

Homilies by the clergy are appropriate at funerals in the church, but eulogies are inappropriate and are to be discouraged.

**Prayer Book Policy:**

*The Book of Common Prayer of the Reformed Episcopal Church in North America (2003)* is the Standard Prayer Book of the Diocese of Mid-America. *The Book of Common Prayer (1928)* and certain other liturgies are permitted under provisions of the Constitution of the General Council or actions of the General Council. Liturgies for the principle Sunday worship service are to be taken from these books. Pastoral use of other previously approved prayer books or liturgies for alternative use is subject to the permission of the Bishop Ordinary within such guidelines and limitations as he may establish. When in doubt, consult with the Bishop.

No minister, Parish or Mission of this Diocese will compose their own liturgy or use any liturgy not approved by the Reformed Episcopal Church in accordance with its constitution and canons.

The Lectionary and Calendar of the Church Year contained in the edition used is permitted for use.

*The Book of Occasional Services of the Reformed Episcopal Church approved in 2011*, as well as any such resources approved by the Reformed Episcopal Church or its sub-jurisdictions or agencies may be used. Other supplement resources should be approved by the Bishop Ordinary.

SECTION IV:  
**Guidelines on the Diaconate**

Deacons and Deaconesses are engaged in a special ministry of servanthood directly under the Bishop. As such, the life and ministry of Deacons and Deaconesses have much less to do with liturgical functions and Sunday morning activities. It is an active ministry in the world, seeking to serve all people, “particularly the poor, the weak, the sick, and the lonely.”

The following guidelines are offered by the Bishop to assist in the discernment of vocations to diaconal ministry in this Diocese. All persons seeking postulancy should familiarize themselves with these guidelines prior to applying to enter into the ordination or, in the case of Deaconesses, the setting apart process. They must thoroughly discuss them in advance with the Presbyter who is to sponsor their application.

The academic course of study in preparation for diaconal ministry will be prescribed by the Bishop either through an in-house course of study for perpetual Deacons and Deaconesses or a degree program for transitional Deacons. Details are found in the GC Canons or in the *Handbook for the Order of Deaconesses*.

**Guidelines for Ordained Deacons and Lay (Set Apart) Deaconesses:**

- 1. Deacons or Deaconesses are usually non-stipendiary.** They do not usually receive a stipend and may not do so without the express permission of the Bishop. Wages, salary, or housing allowances are not to be expected. In certain circumstances, such as a Deacon being called as “Deacon-in-Charge” pending ordination to the Presbyterate, or in the case of a Deacon or a Deaconess being employed for full time, or for substantially full time vocational ministries which are deemed to qualify for exception to this general rule, a salary may be appropriate. Deacons and Deaconesses are, however, to be reimbursed for their reasonable expenses. The

reimbursable expenses related to the performance of their duties should be described in the individual contracts negotiated with the Rector or institution to which they are assigned.

2. **Clerical Collars/Appropriate Attire.** Unless they are engaged in their ministry, or in church related activities, *bi-Vocational* Deacons & Deaconesses wear ordinary street clothes when engaged in their *secular* vocation. Exceptions must be approved by the Rector/Vicar or the Bishop. This rule does not apply to transitional Deacons and Deaconesses engaged in full time ministry. In the case of Deaconesses, clerical collars are never worn; proper attire shall be that which has been approved by the Council of Bishops of the Reformed Episcopal Church.
3. **Deacons** may serve in the liturgical services of the Church under the direction of the Presbyter to whom they are assigned. Deacons do not officiate at public services of Holy Communion from the Reserved Sacrament (so called Deacon's Masses) without being authorized to do so by the Bishop which will only be granted in special circumstances. Deaconesses perform such liturgical functions as prescribed by Canon Law and shall be vested in the blue cassock of their order.
4. **Deacons and Deaconesses are assigned** and re-assigned at the will of the Bishop. Accordingly, no Deacon may be "called" by a Rector, Vicar, or parish to serve as a curate or interim clergy without the prior approval of the Bishop.
5. **Deacons and Deaconesses may have seat and voice** at all meetings of the Vestry if the parish by-laws allow, and they shall make a report to the Annual Parish Meeting regarding their ministry. They may not vote at any Vestry or parish meeting.
6. **Deacons and Deaconesses should have a written contract** in force for one year and reviewed each year. This contract should be renegotiated with the Bishop and the parish or institution to which the Deacon or Deaconess is assigned. This contract should specify the duties, hours, and expenses eligible for reimbursement as well as covering other areas that may be unique to their specific ministry. Those supervising the work of Deacons or Deaconesses shall always be aware that such ministry is voluntary. Therefore, the hours expected must not be more than 10-20 hours per week and must always leave room for occupation and family responsibilities.
7. **The Deacon may preach** at the discretion of the Rector or Vicar of the parish to which the Deacon is assigned. The content of such sermons should be cleared with the Rector or Vicar before being delivered.
8. **Deacons and Deaconesses are entitled to seat and voice**, but not vote in the Annual Synod of the Diocese. However, because it is a lay office, **Deaconesses** may be elected by the parish to serve as a lay delegate or deputy to Synod or General Council. In this capacity, they are permitted to vote at the Annual Synod of the Diocese and at General Council.
9. **Deacons and Deaconesses are expected to attend periodic conferences** as required by the Bishop and should engage themselves in regular study as a way of improving and reflecting upon their individual ministries.

SECTION VI:  
**Miscellaneous Diocesan Policies**

**Episcopal Visitations:**

The packet of forms for an Episcopal visit should be completed and submitted prior to the Bishop's visit. The purpose is to apprise the Bishop of the spiritual, financial, and pastoral health of the parish.

During a visitation of the Bishop, the services are under his direction. If there are to be confirmations or an ordination, the color “red” is to be used. Otherwise, the liturgical color and Propers of the day are to be used. On the occasion of the Episcopal Visitation, a special offering or contribution for the Bishop’s discretionary use may be taken.

Normally, the Bishop's visitation schedule is established at least six months to a year in advance. This requires the clergy to make known any special requests for visitation or local needs far in advance, (i.e. anniversaries, special celebrations, etc.).

**When There Is a Vacancy in a Parish:**

Whenever a Rector resigns or retires and a Parish is left vacant in the Diocese of Mid-America, the following steps are to be taken:

- 1. Notification of Vacancy:** The Senior Warden is to notify the Bishop in writing that the Parish is vacant. The Bishop appreciates a telephone call as well.
- 2. Special Vestry Meeting:** The Bishop will call a meeting of the Vestry in which either he, or another officer of the Diocese appointed by him, will present a comprehensive search process which will lead to the calling of a new Presbyter. A brief description of the search process is outlined below.
- 3. Formation of a Search Committee by the Vestry:** It is expected that the Vestry will either serve as the Search Committee or appoint a Search Committee. In most cases, the Search Committee is comprised of a few Vestry members plus additional parishioners who possess abilities and skills that will help the Search Committee with its task. (Note: at the end of this process when the Vestry elects the new Rector, those who have served on the Search Committee who are not members of the Vestry will not be allowed a vote.) The Vestry alone is authorized to make the final decision (in consultation with the Bishop) and to issue the call.
- 4. The Search Process & Calling of a new Rector:** The process for the search committee and calling of the new Rector should be done in consultation with the Bishop Ordinary in accordance with the guidelines established by the Bishop. These are available on the DMA website under “Protected Resources”.

**Policy regarding Alcoholic Beverages:**

It is the policy of the Bishop that no congregation will engage in the sale of alcoholic beverages or mixed drinks at any function of the congregation or any of its organizations. The *sale* of any alcoholic beverage or mixed drinks is also contrary to the laws of the State of Texas without proper license.



The serving of alcoholic beverages (without charge) at wedding receptions, suppers, picnics, etc., either on or off the church property, is left to the discretion of the Presbyter and the Vestry. Where alcoholic beverages are served, alternative drinks (non-alcoholic) must be provided and attractively displayed for those who desire them.

### **Policy regarding Gambling:**

It is the Bishop's policy to allow congregations or organizations within a congregation to host, sponsor, or participate in raffles and games of chance (i.e., Bingo) provided they are conducted with discretion and have no connection with an outside commercial organization. He does not condone parishes, missions, or other agencies of the Diocese going into the gambling business (sponsoring Bingo halls, etc.).

### **Senior Diocesan Staff:**

The Bishop Ordinary may appoint an Archdeacon or Canon to assist in the administration of the Diocese, as he deems fit. When such persons are engaged in their *official* duties as the Bishop's representative, they are to be accorded the courtesy and respect which is commensurate with their office.

### **Deans and Deaneries:**

The Diocese is divided into geographical groupings of congregations called Deaneries. The purpose of the Deanery is to enable clergy and laity to share common interests and concerns and to work together with more strength than is sometimes available to single congregations. The Bishop appoints the Dean of each Deanery who serves at the Bishop's pleasure. Every Dean is expected to maintain regular contact with the clergy under his charge and to provide pastoral and leadership support under the authority of the Bishop as requested. Deaneries are encouraged to work together for common life and ministry and to have opportunities for clergy and lay fellowship on an ongoing basis.

### **Missions:**

Missions and Mission Works within the Diocese of Mid-America are the responsibility of the Bishop and are part of his apostolic office and of the Diocese of which he is the constitutional head.

The Bishop is the sole authority in appointing clergy and lay persons to serve as wardens in the missions of the Diocese. The Bishop's Committees for Missions will have the same duties as Vestries of Parishes. The Bishop may delegate certain authority to the Archdeacon or a Canon Missioner or Dean of the Deanery.

### **Title to Property:**

As stated in the Constitution of the Reformed Episcopal Church, all parishes and missions hold deed and title to their own real property.

Such title ultimately rests in the congregation as a whole. Accordingly, no real property may be bought, sold, mortgaged or encumbered without approval of the congregation at a duly called Annual or Special Parish Meeting.

In accordance with IRS regulations, all parish by-laws should specify that in the event of the dissolution of the parish or mission, all property and assets must be given to another 501 (c) 3. The final vestry has the responsibility to comply with the law in this regard. Options can include the

diocesan mission fund, or distribution to other ministries deemed compatible with the perceived wishes of the parish. In no case may an individual or for-profit entity receive benefit from the dissolution.

**Insurance and Other Matters:**

Every Parish Vestry is expected to maintain Fire and Casualty Insurance in amounts equal to the replacement value of their property. It is recommended that Liability Insurance of at least one million dollars should be maintained.

Every Parish is required by Law to obtain its own Federal Tax ID Number and shall report all wages and salaries as required by Federal and State law.

Every parish shall be responsible for compliance with the policies of the General Council in matters pertaining to Sexual Harassment, Child Abuse. The Bishop should be notified immediately of any allegations of such behavior.

**Vestry Education:**

It is the duty of every Rector to provide every person elected to the Vestry in his parish the following at the first regular meeting of the Vestry after their election:

1. The Parish By-laws
2. The Constitution and Canons of the General Council of the Reformed Episcopal Church
3. The Constitution and Canons of the Diocese of Mid-America
4. The Customary of the Diocese of Mid-America
5. The Basic Financial Guide of the Diocese of Mid-America

It is his additional duty to see that the Vestry operates in conformity with the above. Generally, when there are disagreements as to the proper interpretation of the By-Laws, Constitution and Canons, or financial oversight, the Rector/Vicar and Wardens should consult the Bishop Ordinary or such persons as he shall designate for clarification.

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