

Seek Him in the Kingdom of Anxiety
Convention Address 2009
The Rt. Rev. Gregory Rickel
October 16, 2009
Vancouver, Washington

Good morning. I greet you all this day in the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Delegates, clergy and lay, visitors and staff, with many thanks to all who have made this gathering possible, and most especially the members of the Columbia Regional Ministry, who have prepared for quite some time for our arrival and have devoted much to making our welcome and our stay here the huge success it that has already been and is sure to be. I don't know if you made it to the opening dinner, but in my estimation it was a huge success. Thank you, Columbia Region.

I also want to extend a special welcome to our honored guest and my friend, Nathan Dungan. I have known Nathan for quite a while and he simply seemed to be the perfect person to have as our keynote speaker this year. You will hear more about him as he presents to us over these two days, but we are very glad he is with us. He barely made it out of Minneapolis, where they had two and a half inches of snow on the ground, so things could be worse.

Last year I stood before you and used my dentist as an example of welcome and professional care. I feel a follow up is in order, simply to say that my dentist has not failed to live up to that over this last year. In fact, shortly after that address and this convention—on Thanksgiving Day, to be exact—I managed to pull a tooth completely out of my head. And as luck would have it, it was one of my front teeth.

I spent about six months finding creative ways to glue this back in. She, my dentist, did in fact help me a lot with that. I did think a bit about simply showing up at Church of the Resurrection, Bellevue the next Sunday, smiling really big as I stepped out: "Hello, I'm your bishop." At any rate, as fun as that might have been, my smile is back intact and the saga of a good dentist goes on.

It was an interesting year, but we have to get on with this one. It is reported that the third Bishop of Olympia, Stephen Bayne once remarked, "I rather feel like a mosquito at a nudist camp. I know what I am supposed to do, but I just don't know where to start." This in fact mirrors greatly my feeling before you today. But start I must, and so I will:

In our *Hymnal 1982*, Hymns 463 and 464 are entitled "He is the Way." These are words by W.H. Auden. They are strange words that somehow have kept coming to me of late.

"He is the Way. Follow him through the Land of unlikeness; you will see rare beasts and have unique adventures.

"He is the Truth. Seek him in the Kingdom of Anxiety; you will come to a great city that has expected your return for years.

"He is the Life. Love him in the World of the Flesh; and at your marriage all its occasions shall dance for joy."

This hymn just has been in the back of my head, through the early part of last year, through General Convention, and through the Standing Committee meeting last week, where I was saying to them, “I don’t know how to find this hymn. Where does it come from?” They all began to help me look it up, and [the Rev.] Georgi Boyle (St. Benedict’s, Lacey) and [the Rev.] Mary Allen (St. Philip’s, Marysville) finally found it on the internet. Then I started looking for the history of the words and the music and was surprised to find this, which some of you already know, I am sure. The first score that I sang in seminary for the first time was by Richard Proulx; it was an anthem, not from our hymnal, and Proulx writes about it as follows:

“This wonderful poem comes from ‘For the Time Being’ by W. H. Auden, written in 1941–1942. Found in the section ‘Flight into Egypt,’ the inspiration comes from John 14:6. Auden’s mystical language invoked this unusual setting in 1976 for the wedding of Mark and Noreen Schedler. Mark was a singer of Richard Proulx’s at St. Stephen’s, Seattle and St. Thomas’, Medina.

Much closer to home than I had thought. The line I was most drawn to over this last year, singing in my head, even when I didn’t know where it all came from was, “seek him in the Kingdom of Anxiety.” It seems we are there.

Our world, our country and our Church have changed greatly since our last meeting, much of it brought on by a financial meltdown of generational proportions but some also brought on by what preceded—an almost unfettered boom of oblivious greed. Our church was not immune. We are subject to the world around us, and if we are not careful, quite susceptible to following what ever way it might go.

However, as I told you in my preconvention video, rumors of our demise are highly exaggerated. Of course, the big news for us is our budget considerations and adjustments, but I must say with all that has befallen us we have a remarkable story of resilience to tell, both as a diocese and as individual congregations.

We were pushed into the land of unlikeness, the “Kingdom of Anxiety,” to reduce our diocesan budget by \$350,000, and that has resulted in staff reductions, which, as we are all painfully aware, and some of you are very much living, include real people. That part is the most difficult.

Beyond that are some “unique adventures.” We are trying to use this jolt to wake us up to the realities of what the Church, with a capital C, must become in the years ahead. My firm belief is that our current structure—nationally, on a diocesan level and locally—is built on a mid-20th century model that is far more top down, program-based and in some ways quite consumeristic, (as I said earlier, we are certainly susceptible to that), and I just don’t think it will work for the future.

Before I go into that I want to do some simple housekeeping; things that just must be in such an address.

I have heard a lot of people say still, “We need a mission and a vision.” I have to admit I am not sure what is being asked for when this is said. In my more cynical moments I think this is a question designed to keep us from doing what we need to do, because the mission and vision is there. I said clearly, or at least I thought I did (which may say something in and of itself) in this address last year that I believe our mission—cogent, clear, life-changing—is our Baptismal

Covenant, found on page 304 of the *Book of Common Prayer*. Were we to follow it to its end, the world would be totally transformed. It gives us a lot to do and a lot to be.

As for what has come to me to work on in that mission, in this place, I have said very clearly since the walkabouts that I would concentrate on three focus areas, these all coming from the profile provided by you in that search process.

Those three are congregational development; people 35 and under; and stewardship of all our resources. In our budget decreases we tried to stay true to those focus areas. We have to know we can't do it all.

I know many will not agree with these and it would be easy to begin adding others, but that has often been the problem with our larger corporate life—we try to do more than we can and often try to do things we can't really do well at this level of the church. I see the diocese as the resource to you, the local, not the place where all things are decided and all programs developed. Some things uniquely fall to the diocese but most are contextual and more authentically developed locally with, hopefully, the design help and resources from the diocesan level.

I had someone recently argue with me that the focus on those 35 and under is exclusive, and I had to vehemently disagree. We focus on certain areas not at the expense of others but so that we might shine the light on that which has either been neglected, or seems to be of greatest need for our future. I can make an argument that a focus on those 35 and under is a radically inclusive focus as it serves to provide a legacy for all the church, current and past, and someone to actually leave the church to.

And they are there. Our youth are among the finest servants of God. When I attend 6-Day and HYC and JYC, I see some of the most respectful and faithful people of any age who I have ever known. They're there, waiting for us; looking to us.

These are the areas I see as the work of the next years. I have not and will not apologize for my focus on them. There will be another time, and other people, who will work other issues and concerns, but for now I remain convinced these are the concerns for our moment in the church.

And so our budget shifts and structural changes are based on these premises, based on us becoming more of a resource to our local congregations. This will mean in the future more of our canon positions will also be in the parish, with our Canon for Congregational Development Melissa Skelton being a prime and stellar example. It will mean a focus on how we help you have the basic foundation where you live to do what you do well where you live.

One new position at Diocesan House will be an Internet Strategist, whose job will be to make the best use of the internet and social networking for our diocese, and to help the local make the best use of these tools as well. This person will be a resource to you, and in fact, if you don't have a website, if you don't have the ability or even the desire to have one, you will. Even if it's the most basic and even if you don't want a thing to do with it, you will have one. Should you want a bit more to do with it, you will have someone to help.

I cannot tell you how often, when I sit and talk to those who are being confirmed or baptized into this church, how many of those under the age of 35, and quite frankly beyond for that matter, tell me they came to the church because of the website. We still have 14 congregations without one. It is my goal to report to you next year that all of our congregations have a website.

Our College for Congregational Development is going very well. We have over 80 people attending, mostly in teams, now in both our weekend and week long programs. They represent over 20 of our congregations and the experience is having great affect.

On the stewardship focus, our Legacy Society is still the largest by far of any diocese in the Episcopal Church, and our giving outside ourselves an inspiration to not only the Episcopal Church but far beyond.

We are nearing our \$500,000 goal of giving to St. Paul's, New Orleans; not to mention the many hands-on trips we have made there. I plan to be there personally in November. This is a good time to remind you that we will honor our retiring Bishop Suffragan Nedi Rivera and her husband, Bob Moore, on Jan. 22 and attempt to give her the gift of finishing this commitment that she inspired by completing this last bit of the promise to St. Paul's. There is more detailed information about all the celebrations of Nedi being distributed at this convention. And there will be other opportunities at this convention to honor and thank her, but we could never do that enough, and I want to do that now. Nedi Rivera: Thank God.

We also sent \$15,000 to Galveston, Texas and I am working with the Bishop of Texas to see how we might offer similar human help to that area which is still recovering from Hurricane Ike.

Two years ago at this convention, I challenged us to give one malaria net for each member in our congregations. I have been so deeply inspired by the excitement and energy this created. I am very happy to announce on behalf of the Seattle Women's Development Council, and all of you, that our diocese from November 2007, when we launched the One-for-One Malaria Net Challenge, until mid-May 2009, raised \$356,770 for malaria nets. This means we raised enough money to fund 29,814 nets, which will cover over 89,000 children for the next five years.

Assuming 33,000 Episcopalians in western Washington, our goal was \$396,000, or \$12 raised for each Episcopalian in our diocese.

So as of May 2009, we reached 90 percent of our goal. And in this day and time that is exquisite!

This program not only inspired us, but it inspired the whole church, many dioceses have since joined in, and ERD is now launching a national malaria net challenge.

I am not going to rehearse all that is going on in these focus areas. Throughout the year we will be focusing our communications on these areas and telling you the stories, and there are many to tell. But I did want to make clear our continued centering on them.

In my pre-convention video I mentioned that we were moving convention to be one day. What I meant by that was one "night" - reducing the time convention members need to stay in a hotel from two nights to one night. The model we are working with for 2010 would have us start mid-to late-afternoon on Friday, go through Friday evening and then continue on Saturday until late afternoon. This will enable those travelling from a distance to travel on Friday, rather than having to arrive on Thursday and spend an extra night in the hotel. The hope is that it will also make it easier for working convention members to participate in our conventions. We are going to try this model for a couple of years and then make decisions about whether we are able to further reduce the length of the conventions. We want to have enough time to be together to do the business we must do, but to also not put undue pressure on our true mission back home.

Mary Lyons, President of the Standing Committee will, after this address, follow me to tell you a bit more about my Mutual Ministry Review, which was done this year and is to be done every year of my episcopate. We tried to include many more people in the feedback this year, including five open meetings around the diocese. I want to personally thank Eldon Olson for his work on this and our Standing Committee who is responsible for seeing to it. It is so valuable for me and for our work together, and it is something all the clergy and congregations should be doing, in some form, so I will be doing it too!

“Seek him in the Kingdom of Anxiety.”

The latest statistics which compare 1965 to 2007 in the Episcopal Church reveal that Membership is down 35 percent, baptisms down 64 percent, Church School Enrollment down 72 percent, and clergy up 75 percent. One of the most interesting subsets of these is that there are only about 1,500 clergy under 50 years old. All of these statistics were known at General Convention, but in a 10 day scurry to try to solve every problem under the sun, these were hardly ever mentioned.

I want you to know I don't read these as some indication that the sky is falling. However, I do read these as a wake-up call to change, and to change radically and soon. I read these to say perhaps what we are using to measure is off, and the whole idea of how people engage with the church is changing, while we are incapable and/or unwilling to change with it.

The spiritual need of the masses, the desire to be in community, the connection to God is not waning. It is alive and well. But the church is losing the ability to make the connection.

Many of you read in Lent, along with your friends in the diocese, Phyllis Tickle's book *The Great Emergence*. She suggests that the world is changing and the Church must too. Lately, thanks to Bob Rhodes and *Leaders for Mission* I have been reading Reggie McNeal's book *“Missional Renaissance: Changing the Scorecard for the Church.”* In it McNeal talks about the difference between the “attractional church,” which is what he would say is the current prevalent model, and the “missional church,” where he suggests we must head. It very much coincides with Tickle and others.

He says this will require three major shifts in our life and our thinking: one, from internal to external in terms of ministry focus; two, from program development to people development in terms of core activity; and three, from church-based to kingdom-based in terms of leadership agenda.

He goes on to describe the difference between where we have been and where we are going. He describes the current Christian worldview as one where the crosshairs of God's love line up squarely on the church, which was the primary concern on earth throughout history. This view had the effect of shrink-wrapping God's activities in the world down to the church. In this system of thought, God preferred hanging out at church with his people. The idea of what it meant to be Christian became synonymous with what it meant to be a committed church person.

Further, the measure of personal devotion to God was the degree of one's separation from the world outside the church. This meant centering one's life on the church and its activities, usually pulling away from people who weren't willing to do the same. The primary focus of evangelism was converting people to the church culture.

Alternatively, he cites a church in Australia where the members of the church make five promises to each other in covenant: 1) to be authentic, 2) to serve a cause greater than themselves, 3) to create community, 4) to be generous and practice hospitality, and 5) to work righteously as a way to be sent by God in to the world. These promises are made to each other in the community; the proof is in their conduct of life beyond the community.

Now, if you are paying attention, it is quite stunning that we have those five questions already, for quite some time, in our Baptismal Covenant. We answer them, “I will, with God’s help.”

Were we to make these shifts, many things would be different. A lot of it causes me pause and makes me nervous, but that is good. Maybe that churning in our stomach is the indication that we are getting close to where we need to be.

This might seem very overwhelming but I am not overwhelmed, and here are a few reasons why. And all the reasons include you, and all the reasons include you, and what I see in you.

Several months ago we were beginning to talk to the people at St. Peter’s, Seaview about its future, wondering what it looked like, if there was one. Over in Aberdeen, Dale McQueen, Tom Halbrook, Don Maddux and Tom Schaffer had other ideas. They felt that St. Peter had a great deal of potential and wanted to do what they could to provide leadership. In fact they talked a great deal about St. Andrew’s providing resources and leadership for St. Peter’s and perhaps even others in the area. Their vision is that these congregations are all part of “the Harbor” and ought to cooperate with each other and share gifts and resources. After all, we are all working for the same Lord and with the same vision for our future.

Tom Halbrook now goes each Sunday and preaches and celebrates for the people of St. Peter’s. There are approximately 30 people in attendance, up from numbers in the teens. To do this, Tom drives 150 miles round trip. St. Peter’s pays mileage but Tom’s time and expertise is a gift. Dale drives that same 150 miles each Tuesday to do the administrative work and some pastoral care. Tom Schaffer goes with Dale on Tuesdays and offers a Bible Study which presently has 25 participants. Dale McQueen and the others rose above the scarcity so often in us, which comes from some belief that there are only so many people around, and not enough to go around, to share and to build. As Steve Wendfeldt reminded us last year, we have already gotten all the Episcopalians.

Grace, Bainbridge Is. has recorded its thousandth member—as a mission (but probably not one for long). It has innovated and brought in youth; it has a website second to none. It dreams big.

St. John’s Sudanese congregation meeting in Tukwila, who I met with just two weeks ago, is working diligently and faithfully to become a mission of this diocese. The inspiration you get by being part of this body is amazing. I encourage you all to go one Sunday afternoon. Be prepared to move! They are an amazing and inspiring body.

Our Hispanic congregations at St. Luke’s/San Lucas, Vancouver; Resurrecion, Mount Vernon; St. Matthew/San Mateo, Auburn; and St. John’s, Olympia. At Ressurecion several weeks ago, along with the other youth of the Komo Kulshan Cluster, I was dragged around Big Lake on a tube at high rates of speed. To Terry Kyлло’s great delight, he was able to throw me off and I ended up drinking most of the lake, but the amazing thing that day was the activity and the diversity of the youth, 20 or so, of all colors and tongues.

And back in May, after a great day at St. Stephen's, Longview I traveled to be with the Hispanic congregation of St. John's, Olympia that evening. I had been out of town that week and Don Maddux and I had been trying desperately to reach each other. We had a bad connection; I thought I heard him say, "There will be about 40 or so people there Sunday." And so when I arrived at St. John's, the first thing I noticed was the lack of parking and the second I noticed was the sea of people, and when I got into the church I found out that what Don Maddux had told me was, "There will be 41 confirmations, seven baptisms and over 300 people present." It was the largest number of confirmations I had done in one place since becoming a bishop.

All Saints, Vancouver, which, after long discussions did not receive a grant from the diocese instead of looking at that as some end used it as an opportunity to discern just what they were being called to be and do now. And in that discernment, they figured out they could do it, and they are doing it.

Epiphany, Seattle, who ended last spring with an average Sunday attendance of six children in their church school, now have over 100 registered and are averaging over 50 a Sunday.

St. Benedict's, Lacey paid off its note on its parish hall and burned it! I was there. The note! We tell them to wear it out, but not like that!

St. Bede's, Pt. Orchard; St. Christopher's, Olympia; St. Augustine's in-the-Woods, Freeland, St. Stephen's Episcopal, Oak Harbor; Emmanuel, Orcas Is.; St. Michael's and All Angels, Issaquah; St. Clare's, Snoqualmie; St. Paul's, Seattle; and Holy Cross, Redmond are all places where their physical facility is stretched or very much starting to be.

There are many I have not named; there are some I have not even been able to visit yet, but this is the year! If haven't seen you this year, you're going to see me whether you want to or not. And here is what I will see there, wherever "there" is, because I see it everywhere, whether I named you or not: I see and hear this great commitment, the desire to be faithful, even if you are not sure just how, the hope to learn and to grow.

It may reveal itself in different ways, but all of you in this room have that spark. We cannot do it alone, and we must not succumb to scarcity—the notion that there is only so much to go around.

We are in strange times but exciting ones; a time of anxiety, rare beasts and unique adventures. But this is the time we have been placed in. It is a time that will require much of us, not the least of which is to suspend that urge, that quick impulse which serves to squelch the new and different, only because of our need for comfort.

At the very least we will need to learn to be gentle with each other; to listen more; to meditate; to ponder; to be in true relationship, even; and maybe more importantly, around those things on which we disagree.

I am going to end this address rather strangely, with two quotes. The first is again from the third Bishop of Olympia, Stephen Bayne, these remarks being made roughly 50 years ago:

"The Church has no mission of its own. All we can have by ourselves is a club or a debating society; and our only hope, left to ourselves, is to win as many members for our own club and away from other clubs as we can. And whatever this is, it is not Mission. Mission belongs to

God. The Mission was His from the beginning; it is His; it will always be His. He has His purposes from the foundation of the world, and the means to fulfill them; and the only part the Church has in this is obedience—a share in the eternal and life-giving obedience of the Son of God... And the most terrible judgment on the Church comes when God leaves us to our own devices because He is tired of waiting for our obedience—leaves us to be the domestic chaplains to a comfortable secular world—and goes Himself into the wilderness of human need and injustice and pain. This judgment does come on churches and nations, when they forget that God is in command, that God does the choosing.”

The second quote comes from Jonathan Meyers, a very recent postulant in our diocese. Jonathan comes out of Church of the Apostles in Fremont; he was confirmed along with my son last December by Bishop Rivera. Jonathan has a Master of Divinity from Mars Hill Graduate School and a certificate in Spiritual Direction. He is young, and describes himself as having two cats but being a dog person at heart. He has long dreadlocks.

He is trying to plant a church in the North Beacon Hill section of Seattle. When I found out he was up to this, and this is key—he didn’t really ask about this, it was his dream. He kept me in the loop, but he was called by God and so I recently asked him to go to the Plant My Church conference at Kanuga. On his blog he writes:

“Last week I was at Camp Kanuga in the hills of North Carolina at the Plant My Church conference. First off, Kanuga was stunning and I can see why Episcopalians on that side of the nation speak so highly of it because even in the rain it is heavenly. The food wasn’t bad either, which is always a thumbs up for a camp/conference center. However I have no idea what is up with the toast. Somebody needs to work on that. I digress.

“There were a handful of key moments for me during my few days there, and one of my first ‘aha’ moments came during a conversation that brought to light the benefit of church plants on the diocese as a whole and on individual parishes. One observation I’ve had from my years of working in established churches is of a mentality that I think holds parishes back, which is an over inflated sense of ownership that devolves into territorialism. I think this is a product of living in a hyper-individualized culture saturated with materialism and consumerism. When this mentality is present and a church planter moves into the neighborhood (however loosely we define neighborhood) there can be a sense within the established parish of feeling threatened, usually fearful of losing members. However, experience has proven that this fear is unwarranted, because the inverse is actually more true. (starbucks has known this for years)

“In areas where new churches are started in a Diocese, the ASA (Average Sunday Attendance) at the already established churches actually increases. This phenomenon may seem counter-intuitive, but it actually makes a lot of sense. The phenomenon is that of stirring the waters or kicking up some dust. When a new church begins it brings about a certain amount of excitement among the spiritual folks in a given area.”

He goes on. He concludes by saying:

“My hope is that the Episcopal churches in the South end of Seattle come together around our various ministries and our call to be the Eucharistic community in the world to encourage and support one another as well as to challenge each other’s paradigms. I look forward to our

community being a benefit and support to the work that God has been doing in the established communities of faith in and around Beacon Hill.”

The third bishop of Olympia and a fresh postulant, 50 years or more apart, speaking much the same.

Jon dreamt this up on his own, or rather at the very least I should say, it did not come out of the diocese. He asked for money but he said if he didn't get it he would try anyway.

When word got out about this, I started hearing from folks, concerned about putting another church in, what would it do to us, fearful, scarcity, anxiety, the land of unlikeness.

I am really going to end, and I am going to do it by paraphrasing the vision statement on the Beacon Hill plant website. It seems like a fitting way to end, and a good invitation to all of us. It says:

“Welcome. This site is intended to be a space for listening, asking questions, and dialoging together about what a new church might be like. Our hope of being a new faith community is to reimagine, with the people of this community, and with the Episcopal Diocese of Olympia a way of life that is defined by the hope of resurrection and the suffering love of a God who is both present in reality, and beyond our best imagination. All are welcome to participate in the creation of this new story.”

The creation of a new story, born out of unlikeness and anxiety, filled with unique adventures, where all its occasions shall dance for joy.

That's a story I am convinced we can write together, and I'm looking forward to joining you in that.