

The Rev. Dr. Gregory Rickel elected 8th bishop of Olympia

The Rev. Dr. Gregory Rickel wants a change in climate.

Rickel was on the list of candidates for the eighth bishop of Olympia. During one of the pre-convention walkabout stops in Seattle, he said how much he was enjoying the weather in western Washington. "In Austin it is already so hot the trees are calling for the dogs."

After being elected bishop by a special convention of the Diocese of Olympia on Saturday, May 12, 2007, Bishop Vincent Warner held a cellular telephone up to a microphone so the entire convention could hear what Rickel had to say. "It's a hot day in Austin."

Rickel also told the convention, "We're looking forward to being with you all in the Diocese of Olympia. The blessings we received while we were with you on walkabout we carry with us today."

The candidates

There were five candidates presented to the convention. All five took part in the walkabout around the diocese from April 30 through May 4. The candidates were:

- The Rev. Dr. Gregory Rickel, 43, rector, St. James' Episcopal Church, Austin, Texas.
- The Rev. Richard A. Burnett, 50, rector, Trinity Episcopal Church, Columbus, Ohio.
- The Rev. Jeffrey D. Lee, 49, rector, St. Thomas Episcopal Church, Medina, Washington.
- The Rt. Rev. Bavi Edna (Nedi) Rivera, 61, Bishop Suffragan of Olympia, Seattle, Washington.
- The Rev. Angela F. Shepherd, 47, rector, St. Philip's Episcopal Church, Annapolis, Maryland.

The discernment process lead to the election

Ralph Provencal, who served as tour host for the candidates during the walkabout, said "The walkabout is the most important part of the process. The election is the culmination of the process."

This theme of discernment was very clearly stated in the materials sent to delegates and alternates. Number one on the list was "Pray daily for discernment and the guidance of the Holy Spirit." Number ten, meant for during the convention, was "Pray for an open mind, an open heart, and spiritual discernment."

The convention itself was in the context of the Eucharist. The lessons used were for the following day, the 6th Sunday of Easter. The election happened as a part of the Prayers of the People. There was prayer and song before each vote.

Vote tabulation was done electronically by an outside firm hired for this purpose. This speed allowed the third and final ballot to be concluded before noon. There was an hour recess for lunch before concluding the concluding the Eucharist and convention.

Three of the candidates withdrew after the second ballot. These were Burnett, Shepherd, and Rivera. Remaining on the third ballot were Rickel and the Rev. Jeffrey Lee.

Example of the support for Lee

The Rev. Karen Ward, Pastor, [Church of the Apostles](#) in Seattle's Fremont area, had her reasons for supporting Lee in the election.

The Church of the Apostles, a joint effort of the Diocese of Olympia and the local ELCA synod, has an active and successful ministry of reaching those in their 20s and 30s. While this is a recent church plant, it supports three other missions and has recently planted a new congregation in Edmonds, Washington.

Ward said, "The Episcopal Church's median age is around 60 years old. Two generations have been skipped. While justice ministries are good, you need people to carry them on in the future."

Lee and St. Thomas' Church in Medina, Washington, has actively supported the work of Church of the Apostles. Ward felt that everything will go on hold with the election of Rickel.

The future of Bishop Rivera in Olympia

After Bishop Nedi Rivera withdrew her name following the second ballot, Bishop Warner praised Rivera for her work in the Diocese of Olympia. After that praise, Rivera received a long and loud standing ovation.

In spite of this show of support, Bishop Rivera said after the election that she may choose not to continue as bishop suffragan of the Diocese of Olympia.

Tom Boyns, a lay delegate to convention, said that Bishop Rivera was called by the diocese for a specific purpose as suffragan. "That purpose is just as valid today as it was then."

The Rev. Rachel Tabor-Hamilton, co-chair of the Bishop Search Committee, said that the Diocese of Olympia needs Rivera even more now. Having heard the people's history, insights, and stories, "she carries our hopes forward to the new bishop."

Reflection on the search process

Tabor-Hamilton said that the Bishop Search Committee came up with such a wonderful slate of candidates. The election of Rickel to be the Bishop of Olympia continues the call "for discernment in order for us to be successful together as a diocese."

The high point for Tabor-Hamilton was getting to that place of discernment. She felt that the slate was so qualified that for whoever was elected "it would be a celebration."

On the other hand, the low point was that only one would be elected. "We need to hold those four people [that were not elected] in our hearts in their ministry."

From this point

Rickel's election must receive consent of a majority of bishops exercising jurisdiction and a majority of the diocesan standing committees. If the necessary consents are received,

Rickel's consecration is scheduled for September 15, 2007, at the Meydenbauer Center in Bellevue, Washington.

The current Bishop of Olympia, Vincent Warner, retires at Rickel's consecration. Warner has served 18 years.