



The Episcopal Diocese of Olympia

The Episcopal Church in Western Washington

www.ecww.org

January 2, 2019

PASTORAL LETTER FROM BISHOP RICKEL ON SUSPENSION OF STATUTE OF LIMITATIONS FOR CLERGY SEXUAL MISCONDUCT

To all the good people of the Diocese of Olympia,

This past summer, at our General Convention in Austin, Texas, the Episcopal Church took some historic and much needed steps in addressing past abuses by clergy toward lay persons and toward other clergy in the church. For far too long there has been too much silence, and often misdirection, when persons in our church were brave enough to bring such allegations forward. I am writing this letter, and asking that it be read in every congregation on Sunday, January 6th and/or January 13th, in order to make you aware of the implementation of one specific resolution from General Convention, namely, D034, which called for the lifting of the statutes of limitations as spelled out in Title IV.19.4 of the Constitution and Canons of the Episcopal Church specifically as it relates to sexual misconduct of clergy. That three-year period of suspension begins on January 1, 2019 and will run until December 31, 2021.

While the canon in question, and all the wording of D034, is attached to this letter and available on our diocesan website, the bishop's blog, and in hard copy for anyone who wishes to have it in that form, the basic result of this suspension is that any allegation against a cleric in this Church for acts of sexual misconduct may be brought forward in this three year window regardless of any prior invoking of a statute of limitations. In short, you do not have to wonder if the allegation comes from too long ago.

In our diocese, the Intake Officer for such allegations is the Rev. Canon Joan Anthony. She can be reached at the Diocesan Office or by simply emailing her at janthony@ecww.org. She can also be contacted directly by phone by calling the diocesan office. If, for any reason you do not feel comfortable reporting this to her, you may also report to the Canon to the Ordinary Marda Steedman Sanborn, your local cleric, any diocesan staff member, and finally the bishop himself. Keeping your confidentiality, especially in the early phases of any allegation and investigation, is our duty.

While I am in complete support of this measure, and voted for it at General Convention, I also want to make clear that since the moment I walked through the doors of D-House to become the 8th Bishop of Olympia, whenever this particular clause regarding statute of limitations has arisen, my response has always been, “there are no statute of limitations in the Body of Christ.” This has been our policy for the past nearly 12 years and will remain so even beyond this 3-year suspension. Also attached to this letter is the letter on this topic addressed to the church, from the President of the House of Deputies Gay Clark Jennings, and our Presiding Bishop, Michael Curry. I urge you to read that too.

There is yet much more work to do on this topic. Our diocesan convention passed a resolution at our most recent convention which calls for the creation of a Task force on Sexual Harassment in our diocese. At our upcoming clergy conference all of these topics will be a major focus of our time together, including input from clergy on the make-up of the Task Force. I invite anyone in the diocese, clergy or lay, to also offer your input on the creation of this committee. You will be hearing much more about all that, and many other topics in the days to come.

I want to summarize that this resolution, as well as our diocesan policy, has as its goal to break down every possible barrier to reporting an allegation of sexual misconduct in this church. As President Jennings and Presiding Bishop Curry said so well in the end of their letter, I will end this one. May this resolution and other steps help “our church move closer to the day when, having repented of our sins and amended our common life, we may be restored in love, grace and trust with each other through our Savior Jesus Christ.”

Please pray for all those affected by misconduct, and pray for our Church. I remain your faithful servant.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Gregory H. Rickel". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "G" and "R".

The Rt. Rev. Gregory H. Rickel
VIII Bishop of Olympia