

Looking back, looking ahead

Bishop forecasts 2009 will be year of creative preservation

By Mary Jane Cherry
Episcopal News Editor

On Jan. 8, Bishop Ted Gulick sat for an interview to reflect on the past year and to look ahead as the diocese begins a new year amid extraordinarily challenging economic times. The diocese at that time was preparing its 2009 budget to be sent to the annual convention and the Standing Committee was in the process of forming the committees to handle the work necessary to find and call a new bishop.

During the 50-minute interview, the bishop not only spoke about the financial challenges our congregations and diocese are facing, but he also looked at the blessings of 2008, which include increasing numbers of new Episcopalians in our churches.

In addition, he addressed questions about congregational pledging practices and audits, the latter a cause for concern at last year's convention because audits are required in order for congregations to be properly credentialed at convention. The bishop said he expect a tougher standard to be applied this year because new, streamlined audit procedures made it easier for churches to meet the requirement.

The questions and bishop's responses follow:

How would you characterize 2008 in our congregational and diocesan life?

I think this was a great year in the Diocese of Kentucky. I don't have the final figures but I believe that we had an increase of over 40 percent in our confirmations and receptions. People are really finding the Episcopal Church to be a wonderful place to live their life in Jesus Christ. One of the great things about being the bishop is that you get to hear stories from people every week who have chosen the Episcopal Church, and you hear these articulate reasons why they are Episcopalians and how life giving our church is for them. For people like myself, a lifelong Episcopalian, it's very important to hear the stories why people choose this church....

You meet with all of those to be confirmed and received beforehand, don't you?

Most churches make it possible for me to meet with them, and increasingly, which is something I love, I frequently teach a class or I'm part of several classes leading up to their confirmations. ... The dean [of the cathedral] and I are having conversations about how I might be a part of the Louisville-area preparation for them....

So there have just been some particularly memorable conversations that I've had this year with people who have made such focused and intentional decisions to become a part of the Episcopal Church. We're seeing larger numbers than we have seen. That's just so encouraging, week after week

Any high points this year?

I would say that [Presiding Bishop] Katharine's visit was a hugely positive event. ... As I mentioned earlier, I've been an Episcopalian all of my life, but I think I can say this ... I believe the



The Rev. Mitch Bojarsky, the diocese's newest priest, was ordained by Bishop Ted Gulick in a service on Jan. 11 at Christ Church, Bowling Green, where Bojarsky is the assistant rector. Assisting Gulick was Deacon Rose Bogal-Allbritten and the Rev. Matt Bradley. With Bojarsky are his wife, Beth, and the Rev. Dr. Michael Blewett, Christ Church's rector. Photo by the Rev. Canon Joan Smith

best liturgy I've ever experienced in the Episcopal Church was the service we had under the tent at All Saints'. In my ministry, as a bishop I am a liturgical chameleon. By that I mean, I try to not compromise the liturgical environment where I find myself. So every week I try to adapt to the environment I'm in, and I would say that liturgy under that tent really expressed my own personal core values of what worship should be like.

I loved the celebrative and very participatory nature of the music by those young people from St. Luke's, Anchorage, with their instruments, lending their talents and their voices. They had obviously prepared, but they weren't overly practiced. They were offering their best to the glory of God. It was very alive and unique to our part of the world and very appropriate for that occasion.

You have adults claiming their faith and being baptized in that lovely pool that Suzanne Barrow invented for the occasion. I saw someone who has yearned to claim his Christian faith since he was a protestor at Tiananmen Square in China, and I watched the waters of baptism flow over him and his wife and his baby. Then to have those wonderful quilts, where we didn't isolate or warehouse the children. ... Our children were the treasured center and not the periphery. And to have deer in the background and hawks circling the tent—creation itself gave us pretty good encouragement. It was such a beautiful day, and the congregation was so diverse (age-wise, racially ...). They came from every parish and were so well prepared for the experience. To see 38 people confirmed from so many congregations, and babies and adults being baptized—it was just very exciting.

Other high points? Any low points?

The two people from our diocese who were ordained priests, Anne Vouga and Matthew Bradley, and the two deacons to be ordained priests this winter, Mitch Bojarsky [who was ordained Jan. 11] and Emily Schwartz [who will be ordained March 25], are such talented,

gifted individuals. The ministries and the gifts that they bring to our church are one of the ways I think God is lavishing God's love on this diocese. To be a part of their formation, to nurture them through the ordination process and to be the bishop that actually ordains them is a personal high point.

I've loved the gatherings with the clergy we've had this year. Ember Day meetings have been very substantive this year. [The clergy gather four times a year on particular days in the church calendar year when it's traditional to pray for the church.]...

This was [youth director] Ben Linder's last summer at All Saints' camp; he had a wonderful staff. I missed being a part of it because the Lambeth Conference took me away.... It was really sad to lose Ben, but his departure has been balanced, of course, by having a person with Beth Bojarsky's gifts [She is the diocese's new youth director].

We've had other losses in our diocese. We lost Paul Jeanes [rector of St. James Church in Pewee Valley who was called to be rector of Trinity Church in Princeton, N.J.]. He served us so well, but then we've received a priest like Michael Blewett, a very talented priest from Missouri who has come to Bowling Green. We're losing Larry Handwerk's gifts and leadership at All Saints'. He was so much more than the camp and conference center administrator, as I said at his retirement party. He did just wonderful work in clergy formation in this diocese; he served as a key interim for us in Elizabethtown, and he is known as a gifted supply priest. We will miss a lot of components of his ministry, but we are looking forward to the ministry of Greg Primo [who has been appointed as All Saints' new executive director] ...

Last year at diocesan convention, concerns were expressed over churches that had not submitted audits and whether their deputies should have voice and vote. Will this be an issue this year?

The first thing we did was change

the audit requirements to make them actually something our churches can accomplish. David Brooks [chair of the Department of Stewardship and Finance] and his committee did yeomen's work to look at other dioceses audit models. They adopted a process for reviewing the financial records of each of our congregations in such a way that the audits have integrity and are possible to accomplish, particularly for some of our less resourced congregations. ... I'm hopeful that we won't have the concerns that surfaced last time about people's credentials not being in order.

If churches haven't submitted a 2008 audit, what will happen at this year's convention? Will they receive credentials?

They are required to get the audits completed or have a very good reason why they don't this year. I would imagine the credentials committee will be more exacting than perhaps they have been in other years because the requirement now is much more possible to accomplish. Of course, there are always situations where perhaps a parish has lost its ordained leader or there may be some exigency still that might need to be considered, but I would hope for a much, much broader and deeper level of compliance than we've ever had.

In the past, concerns have been raised about congregations that do not pledge 15 percent or higher of their net disposable income. What is the diocese's policy on congregational giving?

When I was elected bishop of Kentucky, the diocese was on the assessment system. In other words, it was more like a tax. You had a certain amount of income, and an assessment was levied by the diocesan assessment committee. Parishes were canonically bound to pay it. They had to go before the committee to have their assessment reworked or renegotiated. At the convention in 1994, they changed the whole giving scheme of the diocese.... I came to a diocese that had a giving guideline, a moral guideline ... an expectation, and then the diocese, at a past convention, based the 15-20 percent pledge expectation on the church's income from the two previous years. ... So this year, what the congregations are asked to do, is to give at least 15 percent of their 2007 income. Usually that's a bit of a break because most parish budgets go up every year.

At a recent diocesan convention, a canon was passed that said, "If you cannot make your 15 to 20 percent expectation, then you must give a written explanation to convention."

I thought that was a non-punitive but very Pauline understanding of Christian community. We are one body and, therefore, if one part of the body cannot do its part, the body needs to know that, primarily in case that information shows there is some hurt or brokenness or decline in that congregation ... or if there are certain exigencies that occur in a parish's life—a roof fell in and the church

Continued on page 7k

Sunday breakfasts bring homeless, cathedral communities together

Continued from page 1k

come to share food and fellowship with the homeless. Dean Mark Bourlakas explained that the breakfasts are part of a total program giving cathedral members “an opportunity for community building integrated with worship, study, fellowship and service.”

Jeff Lake and his wife, Julie, both of whom have spent most of their lives working as volunteers or as paid staff in service organizations, cross the bridge from New Albany every first Sunday to be sure the work crew will have what they need to get their work done on schedule.

Jeff, who also arranges the hospitality schedule, said he has no problem finding volunteers. “It’s a popular program,” he says, “even though we never know how many people will be eating. Sometimes we have 25 guests, sometimes 75. Cathedral members who participate not only like the good food, but they enjoy getting to know the homeless people they sometimes see around the church.”

On that cold Advent morning, men and women waiting for breakfast to be served took advantage of the opportunity to wash and prepare to meet the world. A few were seen sleeping on the benches in the corridor outside Bishop’s Hall. A larger group of men traded gossip and jokes.



When a youngish man, dressed in what looked like army fatigues, was asked if he were a veteran, he and the other men laughed. “They wouldn’t take me,” he replied, but pressed by his buddies admitted he had never tried to join the army. “I’m sleeping out there,” he said, gesturing toward the cloister, “and I may be cold but there aren’t any bullets flying around my head.”

An older man chimed in, “I was in Vietnam, but I think those guys in Iraq have it worse than we did. And it’s getting worse over here, too. I just got into Louisville Friday night and I already know I need to move on. Everybody says

there aren’t any jobs around here. This has been one of my regular stops, moving south for the winter, but I guess I won’t stay long this time. I just hope there will be jobs at my next stop.”

A well spoken and well groomed woman who had been standing apart spoke up. “I’m an R.N.,” she said “and I haven’t been able to find a job lately either. I think something’s messed up with my license, but I don’t know what.”

As soon as the cathedral caretaker gave the word, the entire group moved quickly but in an orderly manner toward the coffee pot. Jeff led a prayer, and quickly, quietly, the nearly 40 people moved toward the steaming eggs and golden biscuits.

At the tables, homeless and cathedral members enjoyed the food and the warmth and some ventured into conversation. The dean moved quietly from table to table greeting guests. Some of the homeless were known to cathedral staff and each other. Some guests, clearly regulars, were relaxed and comfortable. Quiet conversations buzzed on until a prayer was said; the guests were invited (not ordered) to attend worship. Some, reluctant to return to the cold, buttoned their coats, rewound their mufflers, collected the apple they were offered “for

later” and left.

Bourlakas scurried around, rearranging tables and chairs and setting up the projector for the class he was about to hold. Some, homeless as well as cathedral members, helped with the furniture and gathered up the used plates and cups, sorting items into the proper bins for trash, recycling and washing.

First Sunday breakfasts are part of a multi-phased program. Worshipers are asked to bring food to help stock the Food Pantry at Calvary Church and the loose offering is directed to the dean’s discretionary fund, which is used to purchase Kroger, White Castle and TARC cards for those in need.

Cathedral hosts for that Sunday were volunteers with the cathedral’s Outreach Committee. Also assisting was Ben Badgett, the cathedral intern who will take over for Jeff Lake while he and Julie are out of town.

Bourlakas said that the Cathedral Chapter wants to expand this successful community outreach program to, perhaps, two Sundays a month unless new conditions in our national economy call for new efforts to carry out our Lord’s command to care for the needy.

Bishop forecasts 2009 will be year of creative preservation

Continued from page 6k

did not have sufficient insurance. It is the diocese’s business to be concerned about that. By informing the diocese, they honor their responsibility to fund the mission of the wider Christian family. I believe that what we have now is a very credible approach to the funding of a diocese.

I am generally very pleased at how seriously our congregations take it and the fact that the vast majority are able to meet those guidelines, some at tremendous cost. For example, I just learned that one congregation this year, in order to keep its commitment to the diocese, is reducing its staff. That is a pretty significant understanding of the responsibility to be a part of the mission and ministry of the larger church. We genuinely ache for those whose positions have been cut, however. That’s a difficult, difficult reality.

If the pledge is based on two years ago, what does that mean for our congregations this year, given these economic times?

It is paid for in today’s pledge dollars. The truth of the matter is, our financial reality this year may be in crisis. We have Episcopalians who have lost their jobs. We have Episcopalians whose retirement savings, at least on paper, are 40 to 60 percent of what they thought they were. The kind of anxiety that that creates is real. What I’m hoping we’ll do, what I’m going to try very hard to do as a Christian leader and a Christian person ... is to bless God “for my creation, preservation and all the blessings of this life,” which is from a very familiar collect in morning prayer.

Even though many of us have had financial reversals, some are in financial crisis and a few in financial catastrophe, nonetheless most of us can still praise

God for many more blessings than deprivations. We live in beautiful homes, particularly compared to the rest of the world. Many of us sit down to a table with an abundance that would be unknown in many parts of the world. Most of us are still employed and have income and resources. We have not experienced life that the people in Gaza are experiencing, so there is still such abundance. God is abundant, and we can’t lose sight of that truth even in the midst of other realities.... As I’m hearing stewardship stories both from our congregations and seeing the early pledges coming into the diocese, I’m amazed at how generous most of them are, given the financial realities. ...

We’re going to have to make some pretty stretching decisions when it comes to the financial operation of this diocese. Last year I was very, very moved that our giving went up six percent, but that is certainly not going to be the situation this year. That’s pretty easy to understand in this particular year. Last year our budget was about \$1.4 million... about a million came from our parish pledges and about \$400,000 more or less came from our taking a certain percentage of the last 12 quarters of our endowment. That endowment on paper is worth considerably less than it was a year ago, so we know before we do anything that the amount of money we can take from that corpus will be much less than it was. So there will be some real belt tightening I think in this budget.

In the wake of the today’s economic downturn, some have expressed the point of view in discussions about church spending that “If it doesn’t have to do with discipleship, bag it.” How would you characterize diocesan spending?

I don’t believe there has been a lot of “theological” fat in our budget. I think the Diocese of Kentucky budget has been pretty much a financial descriptor of where we’re committed to mission and ministry.

For example, in my convention address I’m going to mention five or six young Episcopal leaders in this diocese ...

My point will be that we invest a lot of money in mission; it takes a lot of money to raise up the next generation of lay and ordained leaders. I don’t think we’ve been wasting a lot of money; I think we’ve been spending a lot of money and getting profound living dividends who are faithful, intentional Christians. Most of what we do is toward discipleship. I’m sitting here talking to you, and you communicate what we do in this church. It’s all designed to making Christians and then making Christians who make a difference in God’s world. That’s why we exist. I could pretty much show a discipleship connection with practically every dollar we spend, so that’s why it’s very worrying thinking about cutting it.

Since we don’t have a lot of fat, and given our economic realities, what is your strategic plan for this next year?

What we have to do strategically this year is to not lose ground. How do we not lose ground? ... I don’t want to see it as a maintenance year, but I do see it as a preservation year for preserving the gains, given the financial times, and doing that creatively. Some of our smaller congregations will probably be combining ministries. Churches will be linked in more creative ways, and this is not all bad. We’ll ask the diocesan staff to do some different jobs and multi-task. Many of our priests have not received cost of living increases, nor have many

of our lay staffs, and that could well be true with our diocese. I would hope at this point we would not whine about that. It will give us a chance to experience some solidarity with the rest of the country in this difficult time. It will also help us to be somewhat creative in how we link and meld and manage ministries in different configurations without losing some of the good ground we’ve gained.

This is something all of us can consider when we think about how to face economic challenges in our own lives.

In my own life, the truth of the matter is, Barbara and I are very blessed financially. I’m paid by the Dudley Trust, and they are going to have to cut back this year. I’m also just a few months from the possibility that I’ll just be living on the pension... Barbara and I are doing something we haven’t done for a while ... we grocery shopped the way we used to ... We made the menus and clipped the coupons, and we made sure we were in Kroger on senior day. That means that one of the things I will not do is cut back my tithe and other charitable commitments I’ve made. ... We will have very few deprivations but we’re being more careful in ways that will help us be better stewards.

At the end of the interview, the bishop noted that he and Barbara were about to experience two personal high points for 2009. On Jan. 24, their daughter Robin Gulick, was to be ordained to the priesthood at the National Cathedral in Washington D.C. during a service in which he and two other bishops would participate. On Feb. 15, the Gulicks’ grandchild Owen, the son of John and Amy Gulick, will be baptized at St. Andrew’s Episcopal Church in Louisville.