

The New Olympian

April 2009

The Monthly Newsletter of the Olympic View Community Church of the Brethren
tel. 206-525-8900 • www.olympicchurch.org e-mail: info@olympicchurch.org

The forecast:

a strong likelihood of liminality

By Pastor Ken Miller Rieman

If I had a nickel for every time in Seminary that I heard the word 'liminality', I could have gone into the free ministry instead of searching for a full-time paid position. But as overused as that word was, I find it returning to me in a powerful way. It describes, so well, my personal, and if you'll allow, our collective, state of being.

Blessings to the great Wiki who offers a definition for liminality: *(from the Latin word 'limen,' meaning "a threshold") is a psychological, neurological, or metaphysical subjective, conscious state of being on the "threshold" of or between two different existential planes, as defined in neurological psychology (a "liminal state") and in the anthropological theories of ritual...*

OK, maybe that's of limited use to us. Bottom line, we're standing on the threshold of great change.

One year ago, I was emotionally recovering from the shock of my father's near death. His cerebral hemorrhage left him on the threshold of life itself. I was forced to contemplate a life without him—a life with just one parent.

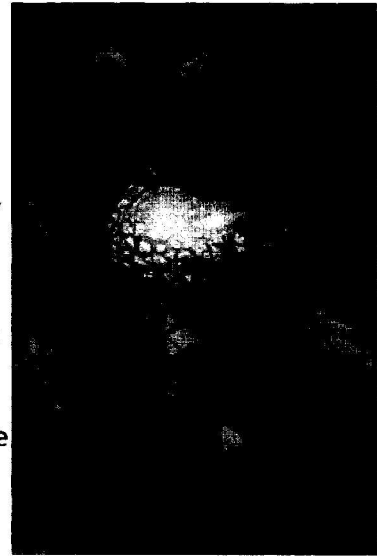
With the love and prayers of so many, and a Herculean will to recover, my father fought his way through intensive care, the rehab hospital, and completed his physical therapy goals ahead of schedule. By Memorial Day, he and Mama were

visiting me and Kate in Seattle.

Prior to that, I'd taken my parents' health, largely for granted. After that, there was a feeling that our time together was 'bonus' time. It was a great gift, and not to be squandered. Last summer, there were people at the Rieman reunion who hadn't been there for years. They shared my sense of this being gifted time. None of us imagined we'd all be back together so soon, holding each other through the loss of both of my folks.

But the changes continue. As my sisters and I sorted through my parents' things in Indianapolis, we watched the inauguration of a historic presidency. Politics aside, it was a moment of great pride, the realization of a dream my parents had pursued from the beginning of their life together.

Last month, my sisters and I re-united with the wider Rieman clan again to mourn the loss of my cousin Cooper. At age 16, he succumbed to the Muscular Dystrophy which had so forcibly



(Continued on page 2)

The New Olympian

Olympic View Community Church of the Brethren
425 NE 95th Street
Seattle, WA 98115

CHANGE SERVICE REQUESTED

Non-Profit Org.
U.S. Postage Paid
Seattle, WA
Permit # 01259

shaped his life, and the daily reality of his family. They are crossing the threshold.

This week, I was grieved to learn of a different kind of passing. Our denomination has closed its Washington Office. In High School, I'd attended two seminars, organized by the office, to help youth consider what it means to be citizens of both this nation, and God's kingdom. It helped me to see the folly of practicing a faith which disregarded the important connection between our faith and how we live with each other.

In college, I'd spent a summer there as an intern, helping to keep the national church abreast of major policy concerns, and helping our legislators to hear the voice of our church as they wrote new laws. I saw, firsthand, what a difference Christians could make by bringing their conscience to the national conversation table.

Through the years, I've seen that very few institutions have the kind of witness that we have had. Our character and values as a church made our voice unique, not so much on any single issue, as on the whole of our witness. I could not imagine us being who we are as a church without having a voice in Washington.

There's been no bonus time, no warning. On my birthday, the just shut it down, a budget necessity. It turns out the denomination is really hurting. The Washington office was closed in a move which has terminated a number of staff positions, totaling over \$500,000 in annual expenses.

We stand on the threshold of a new age. Ministries which were funded by endowments are shutting down, or are draining resources from those which aren't. Church membership is down, and the younger members who join don't tend to share the traditional commitment to denominational, let alone, congregational ministries. Some of these ministries have been cut loose, left to find their own revenue. The ones which have been able to connect with people's hearts have adapted well to the new reality.

It is hard to 'spin off' an official church office. You could make it independent, but then it's not really speaking for the church. You could try to join our office to those of other churches, strug-

gling to keep theirs open, but it's hard enough to get Annual Conference delegates to find common ground on the issues which the office represents, let alone the delegates from multiple church offices.

As I write, we're still in the Lenten part of this journey. Our existential state is in crisis, and in many ways decline. I can feel it personally, in the life of our denomination, and in the economic crisis that roils our nation and planet. We know the journey to the cross because we are living it.

But our reality is also changing. The things which once were are being replaced by new things. We stand in the doorway of this changing reality, still unclear about the possibilities. At the very least, we are learning the lesson of impermanence. Our world doesn't stay the same. The question is, will we?

Will we so defiantly cling to the old reality that we don't even try to understand what is changing? Will we deny the change, and the grieving it requires, and become emotionally unequipped to face our need to adapt? Will we find it too cumbersome to honor our legacy and abandon it altogether. Will we lose who we have been as we uncritically embrace the popular conceptions and temptations of our new reality?

Between the cross and the open tomb, the friends of Jesus live in liminality. They live between what they have learned and known, and what they are called to become. They live between the kingdom come, and the kingdom still coming. The friends of Jesus are those with the courage to see both realities and know that they are in between.

I give thanks that I am not here on the threshold alone. It can be a pretty shaky place, and I'm glad for those who are helping to hold me up, for those who help me imagine new ways to be in relationship with each other and with our legacy, and for those who deepen their commitment to our common life in the body of Christ's love. With hearts open and faces lifted may we face the new day.



