June 24, 2026

“Where I am terrified by what I am for you, I am consoled by what I am with you. For I am a bishop for you, with you I am a Christian. The former is the name of an office assumed, the latter of grace; the former is a risk, the latter salvation.”

-- St. Augustine of Hippo (354 – 430),
Sermo 340.1 (PL 38:1483)

My dear Siblings in Christ Jesus,

I am writing this on June 24th, the Feast of the Nativity of St. John the Baptist, and the 40th anniversary of my ordination to the transitional diaconate in Christ Church Cathedral, Indianapolis. It is also a bit over a month since Libby was elected as the sixth Bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Hawai‘i. She has received the needed consents to her election from Bishops and Standing Committees. Her ordination to the episcopate is now set for November 14, 2026. She is our Bishop-elect.

As a Diocese and as individuals, we are in a liminal time. The word originates from the Latin word *limen*, which means "threshold". During liminal time, you are suspended on the threshold of change. It is time marked by ambiguity, expectation, uncertainty, and transformation. It is time to look back and to look ahead. It is, I think, a normal time for Christians. We are always caught between the gift of Easter and the hope of the fulfillment of God. We live in the world, but also in the realm of God’s already and not yet. This is especially such a time for the Diocese of Hawai‘i.

As I look back to the election last month, Libby, Andrew, and Tim opened themselves to discernment and the movement of the Holy Spirit. One always enters such discernment imagining what the future will hold. Each was asked to describe a ministry and a future for a diocese about which they only had an inkling. It was a personally risky undertaking. I particularly recognize that Andrew and Tim offered their all. Part of living in a liminal time is allowing the “what if” of life to fade and to look ahead. I particularly appreciate that Andrew and Tim (and the other applicants and nominees, some of whom I know and many I do not) who risked themselves to walk with us as a diocese in discernment. Andrew is still a part of our ‘ohana and his na‘auao is still with us. Tim will always be woven into our story. We owe them our gratitude and love as we prepare for the future.

As a diocese in a liminal time, we hold the reality that there is only one bishop at a time. I am the bishop until Libby’s ordination and I hand her the crozier. Yet, the Diocesan Council and I must prepare a budget for 2027 that will be supportive of the ministry of the new Bishop. The Diocesan Support Center must prepare for the sixth Bishop. All of us have things we want to share.

In such a liminal time, I am taking stock of the past to prudently share all that I can with Libby. I must do so prayerfully and with detachment. One of the things I learned from working closely with Bishop Chang and from these years as your Bishop is that the bishop carries some burdens and criticisms that must go unspoken. Stuff happens. I don't mean the inappropriate things like clergy misconduct or congregational dysfunction. Those matters are now handled in a transparent way.

I mean the bishop must hold the pain and anger of others – a pastoral reality for all clergy. Recently, I was told that it is good thing that I am retiring because I am too progressive. In the same week, someone else wrote to tell me that I lacked courage and needed to be more vocally critical of the Administration in Washington and to join marches. Bishops get caught in their times. Folk get angry at their clergy and clergy have difficulties with congregation members. There is pain and anger from the past. Some folk – really just a very few – carry that pain and anger to the bishop. Some stories need to be left to God and forgotten.

As a small and highly relational diocese like ours, the stories are layered and some go back a long time – there is generational pain. In a liminal time, the ongoing discernment includes giving thanks for what is good and holy, being aware of points of tension, and sorting facts from myth. We all tell stories that morph with time into our own image of the past and influence our projections into the future.

As we live into this liminal time, I hope we can allow Libby to grow into being the type of bishop she is called by God to be. We must set aside our expectations and assumptions. The position description for an Episcopal bishop is laid out in the ordination rite (pages 512 to 523 of the Book of Common Prayer). She has promises to make.

Libby will be the twelfth bishop to serve in the Hawaiian Islands, the sixth Bishop of the Diocese of Hawai‘i, and, by my count, the sixth to be the Bishop from Hawai‘i (having one title or another) with care of Guam and Saipan. Each Bishop before – like each Christian -- had their own personalities and ministries. Each was shaped by the ministry and by the islands. From my perspective a bishop is always called to be a bishop of a place and of a people. During the liminal time as my ministry as Bishop Diocesan concludes and Libby takes up her new calling, some things will be left to the past and forgotten, others offered as gifts of learning, hopes and dreams will be shared, and the impact of reality felt. Libby will be our Bishop needing our prayers and support.

St. Augustine concluded the sermon that I quoted at the beginning of this letter with these words: "Therefore, let us pray together, beloved, that my episcopate might be beneficial both to me and to you; for it will benefit me if I speak what ought to be done; and you, if you do what you have heard. For if both we pray for you and you pray for us with perfect love of charity unceasingly, we will come happily to eternal blessedness, with the Lord's help. This may He deign to grant, who lives and reigns for ever and ever. Amen."

I have asked that congregations pray the following prayer during all the liturgies of this Diocese from now until November 14th:

Almighty God,
you call your Church in every age
to proclaim the Gospel of Christ Jesus:
look with mercy upon your servant Libby,
and grant that, as deacon, she may care for those in need,
as priest, sustain us with the ministry of word and sacrament,
and once our bishop, guard the faith
and build up the body of Christ in holiness.
Give her wisdom and kindness
that as our bishop, she may promote unity, seek truth,
and lead us in the way of righteousness and peace;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever. Amen.

I hope every Episcopalian in the Diocese will make this prayer part of their daily prayer time.

“No ia mea, e nā hoahānau, e kūpaʻa ʻoukou, me ka nāueue ʻole, me ka hoʻomau i kā ʻoukou hana nui ʻana i ka hana a ka Haku, no ka mea, ua ʻike nō ʻoukou, ʻaʻole i make hewa kā ʻoukou hana ʻana ma ka Haku.” Korineto I 15.58

“Therefore, my beloved, be steadfast, immovable, always excelling in the work of the Lord, because you know that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.” 1 Corinthians 15:58

Aloha ma o Iesu Kristo, ko mākou Haku,
+Bob

The Right Reverend Robert L. Fitzpatrick

Bishop Diocesan
The Episcopal Diocese of Hawai'i
The Episcopal Church in the Hawaiian Islands, Guam and Saipan