



Forming Leaders for Cherished Belonging

By The Rev. Cn. Andrew J. Arakawa, Canon for Ministry Formation

I just read and highly recommend *Cherished Belonging: The Healing Power of Love in Divided Times* by Fr. Gregory Boyle, S.J. In the book, Boyle invites us to imagine a community shaped not by separation and judgment, but by love and kinship. His nearly four decades of work at Homeboy Industries – the world’s largest gang rehabilitation and reentry organization – rest on two unwavering principles:

Everyone is unshakably good—no exceptions.

We belong to each other—no exceptions.

Boyle’s book invited me to wonder about what it means to form Christian leaders: lay and ordained who not only carry out the work of the Church, but also help create communities in which people know themselves to be seen, valued, and loved.

We rightly value skills, knowledge, and competencies. We need leaders who can teach the faith, lead prayer and worship, care for neighbors, welcome newcomers, organize ministries, facilitate healthy conversations, serve on vestries and committees, and steward resources faithfully. These are essential gifts for the life of the Church.

Yet Christian leadership asks something deeper of us. It asks: Who are we becoming as followers of Jesus? How do we help people know they belong? And how do our leadership practices create communities where every person’s gifts are recognized and welcomed?

Boyle’s first conviction teaches us to begin with dignity. If every person is unshakably good, then leadership begins by looking for gifts rather than deficits. This does not mean ignoring conflict, harm, or the need for accountability. It does mean refusing to define someone solely by a failure, disagreement, or difficult season. How do the leaders of our congregations, schools, and ministries recognize that each person bears the image of God and has something essential to offer?

Boyle’s second conviction teaches us that leadership is relational. If we belong to one another, leadership cannot be exercised at a distance. It requires listening, presence, humility, and a willingness to be changed by those we serve. It moves us beyond asking, “How can I help them?” to asking, “How can we grow together as Christ’s body?”

This kind of leadership makes room for new voices. It holds differences without deepening division. It recognizes pain without allowing pain to define the future. It invites others into real responsibility and shared ministry.

My hope is that the Waiolaihui‘ia Center for Ministry will help form leaders who embody these practices. Leadership formation is not simply preparation for an office or task. It is the ongoing spiritual work of becoming people whose presence makes belonging more possible.

Growing in Grace – Formation Perspectives seeks to cultivate a community of lifelong learners as disciples of Christ within our diocese. The articles offer resources, share formation stories, and give updates on the Waiolaihui‘ia Center for Ministry. Please reach out to the Rev. Canon Andrew Arakawa if you have story ideas or resources that can add to this ongoing conversation: aarakawa@episcopalhawaii.org.