

A banner with a background of a beach and ocean. The text "Growing in Grace: Formation Perspectives" is in a large, blue, serif font. Below it, "Wem WAIOLAIHUI'IA CENTER for MINISTRY" is in a smaller, blue, serif font, and "For all God's people" is in a blue, cursive font.

# Growing in Grace: Formation Perspectives

Wem WAIOLAIHUI'IA CENTER for MINISTRY For all God's people

## **Victory Through the Cross: Rethinking Leadership as Growing in Grace**

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

I love that the motto for our diocese is *He Lanakila Ma Ke Ke 'a*, Victory through the Cross. I especially appreciate the word “through.” It reminds us that our lives as followers of Jesus are always cruciform, shaped by his self-giving love. Our identity, our relationships, our use of power, and our hopes all take their form from his dying and rising.

I found myself returning to our diocesan motto as I read Nicole Massie Martin’s book *Nailing It: Why Successful Leadership Demands Suffering & Surrender*. I highly recommend the book. It is a relatively quick read, yet it offers much to consider as we reflect on how we form leaders in our communities.

Martin’s central metaphor of “nailing it” invites us to crucify the very habits that often define institutional life: power, ego, speed, performance, perfection, loyalty, and scale. This is especially important in our diocese, which is shaped by a multilayered and nuanced cultural landscape. Martin’s rejection of ego-driven and platform-centered leadership opens space for a more mutual, relational model, one that honors the cultural and spiritual richness of our diocese. Her vision of low-ego leadership reflects our shared hope for leadership that walks alongside us rather than ahead of us.

In a diocese connected by the vast Pacific Ocean (Moananuiākea), intentional relationship-building is essential. We are invited to move away from the temptation toward speed and performance. Martin’s call to slower discernment, shared leadership, and faithfulness over outcomes offers a way for us to imagine and embody more collaborative models of leadership across our diocese.

Ultimately, Martin’s cruciform approach reframes leadership not as control or success, but as surrender shaped by the cross. She does not offer strategies to avoid the challenges we face: burnout, leadership shortages, financial strain, and the ongoing work of justice and reconciliation. Instead, she insists that God meets us precisely within them, on the cross. Leadership, then, becomes a site of ongoing formation, a true growing in grace, as we examine our stories, release unhealthy patterns, and rediscover our identity as beloved in Christ.

Here are some questions for us to ponder –

1. Which of the seven areas Martin names (power, ego, speed, performance, perfection, loyalty, scale) most shapes your leadership right now? What might it look like to “nail” it to the cross?
2. Where might you or your community be prioritizing speed or performance over discernment and relationship? What would slowing down look like in practice?
3. How does your leadership reflect a posture of walking alongside others rather than leading ahead of them? Where is God inviting you into deeper humility or shared leadership?
4. In the midst of current challenges (personal or communal), where do you see God meeting you, and how might that reshape your understanding of faithful leadership?

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*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](mailto:aarakawa@episcopalhawaii.org).