



Made to Matter: Formation Through the Lens of Imago Dei

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I just started reading Jennifer Breheny Wallace's book *Mattering: The Secret to a Life of Deep Connection and Purpose*. She describes mattering, knowing that we are valued and have a real chance to add value to the world, as one of the deepest hungers of the human heart. In theological terms, this is a question of anthropology: what it means to be human in light of God's creating and saving love, rather than in light of achievement or status. Christian theological anthropology insists that our mattering begins not with what we do, but with the God who creates us and calls us beloved.

In a world that so often measures our worth in grades, paychecks, productivity, or how "useful" we appear to others, the gospel offers a radically different vision of what it means to be human. We are not units of production for the economy or even for the church; we are beloved children of God. The grace of God does not wait to see what we can accomplish before naming us as precious. In baptism, God's "yes" to us comes before our achievements, our failures, or our usefulness. Christian formation, then, is not about training better performers; it is about helping one another live into the truth that our value is received, not earned. At the same time, formation invites us to discover and uplift the particular gifts God has already placed within us, and to help others recognize and offer their gifts as well.

The epistle reading from this past Sunday (1 Corinthians 12:3b-13) teaches that each person is created in the image of God (imago Dei) and named as Christ's own forever in baptism. Paul reminds the church that "to each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good," and that we are all baptized into one Body with many members, none of whom can say to another, "I have no need of you." Put simply, theological anthropology tells us that we are image-bearers and members of Christ's Body, made for relationship with God, one another, and the created universe. When we take this seriously as a diocese, formation becomes less about information and more about shaping communities where people are seen, known, and entrusted with genuine responsibility.

In a culture that often says we matter only if we are constantly producing, Christian formation in this diocese invites us to remember a different story: in Christ, we matter first because we are beloved, and then because we are sent.

Questions for reflection:

1. When in your life have you most clearly experienced that you “matter” to God or to the church? What made that experience so powerful for you?
2. If every person is created in the image of God, how should that shape the way we see and treat those who are often overlooked in our congregation or community?
3. Paul says that each member of the Body of Christ is needed for the common good. Where do you see your own gifts contributing to the life of the Body, and where might you still be holding back?
4. Think about a time when you felt you did not belong or did not matter. What could a Christian community have done differently to reflect your true identity as imago Dei?
5. As a congregation or small group, what one concrete practice could you adopt in the next month to help someone on the margins know that they are seen, valued, and needed in Christ’s Body?

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: arakawa@episcopalhawaii.org.