

Growing in Grace: Formation Perspectives

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

Rethinking Formation for the Church We Have

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

A recent article in *The Living Church* reported that the House of Bishops and seminary leaders spent extended time reflecting on the future of theological education across our church at their retreat at Camp Allen, Texas. Their conversations named a shared reality: the world in which our leaders are formed has changed, and so must the ways we prepare them. They spoke of the need for closer collaboration between bishops, seminaries, and diocesan programs as we raise up leaders for many contexts, not just one imagined “standard” parish.

Across the Episcopal Church, bishops and seminary leaders are naming a clear shift: the future of theological education cannot rest solely on traditional, residential seminary models. Instead, the emerging picture looks more like a network of seminaries, diocesan schools, and local programs that together form leaders for many contexts, not just one. That vision resonates deeply with life and ministry here in Hawai‘i.

Our Hawai‘i, Guam, and Saipan, contexts are never abstract. Ministry happens in multilingual congregations, in our diocese that is connected by the Pacific Ocean, where travel is costly, in communities shaped by Kanaka ‘Ōiwi and CHamoru (Chamorro) histories, plantation stories, militarism, and global tourism. Leaders here need formation that honors our multilayered cultures, and the particular joys and struggles of their own communities. Our local formation program through Waiolaihui‘ia Center for Ministry has been one of the ways the Holy Spirit forms leaders for the church.

We are looking for ways to revitalize our full local formation program, which went dormant in 2023, as a pathway toward ordained ministry in the Church. With diocesan support and in partnership with the Iona Collaborative and the funds provided by their grant, we aim to have something up and running in 2027.

Here are some reflection questions for us as we think about forming leaders for our unique context.

- How does your local context (culture, history, language, community needs) shape the way you understand the Gospel and live out your faith?
- What gifts and experiences do people in your community already carry that could be nurtured through local formation?

- What excites you or challenges you about the idea of local, context-based formation as a pathway to forming leaders?

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.