



Wrestling Toward Grace: Building Community Through Sacred Conversations

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

One of my favorite Bible stories is the Hebrew Bible lesson for the lectionary this past Sunday. It's the story of Jacob wrestling all night long with a stranger (who turns out to be an angel of God) in the Book of Genesis (Gn 32:22-31). At the end of the night, I love that Jacob's name gets changed to Israel, which can be translated to mean, "one who struggles with God." From Jacob's new name, Israel becomes a nation, and the Israelites become a people (people who struggle with God). The same people who are the forebearers of our Christian faith tradition.

It's important for us to remember the above aspect of our religious heritage, especially as Episcopalians, where our denomination is undergirded by Richard Hooker's three-legged stool (Scripture, Tradition, Reason). We are called to wrestle and struggle with the ineffable mystery of God and seek out hard truths and deep questions, rather than settle for easy answers. Rabbinic Judaism has a dialogical practice of *machloket l'shem shamayim*, or "disputes for the sake of Heaven," which are respectful, sincere debates aimed at uncovering divine truth rather than winning an argument. These debates reflect a belief that truth can emerge through multiple perspectives, and that disagreement, when done thoughtfully, is a sacred act of study and devotion.

What can we learn from our Rabbinic friends about how we engage with one another and build community as the Diocese of Hawai'i?

In our Hawai'i cultural context, we value social harmony, which is an incredibly beautiful aspect of our lives here. Harmony, however, if not mutually felt, can be a veneer covering simmering tensions and unresolved issues. This can lead to passive-aggressive behavior, feeling like we are not able to share our full selves, or speak our truths, then feeling oppressed, instead of in a movement toward a transformed way of being.

Here are some things for us to consider as we, with grace and thoughtfulness, address the complex questions and issues facing our congregations, communities, and our diocese.

- Relationality is foundational to our lives in Hawai'i.
 - Resolutions must aim not only for intellectual understanding, but for restoration and enhancement of relationships.
- Our deeply felt issues are rarely binary.

- In our dialogues with one another, be open to integrating contradictions and complexity, holding multiple perspectives and truths lightly, rather than pursuing polarization. Remember, we are people of the Via Media (the middle way).
- We are all Imago Dei.
 - We are all called to the sacred work of bringing more of God's love into the world. Recognizing the Divine Image of God in each other and in ourselves compels us to approach our interactions with inherent respect, integrating diverse

By embracing these practices of wrestling toward grace, engaging in sacred conversations, and honoring the inherent dignity of each person, we can cultivate a community where genuine harmony flourishes and truth emerges through respectful and transformative dialogue.

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.