



Emotional Intelligence: Making Room for Grace

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

A difficult email arrives. Someone questions a decision we have made. A conversation takes an unexpected turn. Before we fully understand what's happening, we may already feel defensive, anxious, or frustrated. These ordinary moments can become invitations to formation, not because our feelings are wrong, but because they invite us to notice what's happening within us and choose how we will respond.

Viewed theologically, emotional intelligence is not a technique for controlling emotions or managing people. It is a lifelong practice of becoming more truthful about ourselves, more attentive to others, and more free to respond in ways shaped by the love of God.

In *Emotional Intelligence for Religious Leaders*, John Lee West, Roy M. Oswald, and Nadyne Guzmán highlight six capacities: emotional self-awareness, emotional self-control, empathy, organizational awareness, influence, and conflict management. Their approach connects the leader's inner life with the practical work of nurturing relationships and guiding communities.

These capacities offer a useful lens for spiritual formation. Self-awareness invites us to bring our feelings honestly before God. Self-control helps us respond thoughtfully rather than react impulsively. Empathy calls us to listen for another person's experience. Organizational awareness encourages us to notice the anxiety, fatigue, hope, or unspoken concerns within our communities.

Prayer and Scripture give this work depth. The Psalms make room for lament alongside praise. James calls us to be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to anger (James 1:19). These invitations do not ask us to become emotionless. They invite us to discern how our feelings might inform, without determining, our actions.

A simple pause can help. We can name the feeling, offer a brief prayer, and ask: "What response would honor this person's dignity and the truth of this situation?" Sometimes the answer is patient listening; sometimes it is a boundary, an apology, or a difficult conversation.

We learn through community, too. Trusted companions help us recognize patterns we miss. Reflection, discernment, and the Spirit's transforming work make room for accountability and repair.

Between what we feel and what we do, we can turn toward God. That space can become a place where grace grows.

Questions for Reflection

- Which emotions most often shape my responses under pressure?
- What might God invite me to notice before I speak or act?
- Whose experience needs more attentive listening?
- What practice could help me make room for grace this week?

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.