

Who We Are Shapes How We Grow

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When we gather for a learning opportunity, a book or Bible Study, a film review, or a conversation about ministry, we bring more than our Bibles and questions. We bring our stories: the families and communities that raised us, the cultures that shaped us, and the experiences that taught us whom to trust and where we belong. We do not leave our identities at the door.

I've recently started a reading project at 'Iolani School based on Liza Talusan's *The Identity-Conscious Educator: Building Habits and Skills for a More Inclusive School.* Talusan invites educators to recognize how identity shapes the ways we understand the world and interact with one another. Her invitation offers a helpful lens for formation in our diocese: becoming more attentive to the experiences we bring, and to those of the people beside us, can deepen our capacity to listen, learn, and grow together as Christians.

Formation is not simply the transmission of information. Learning Scripture, exploring our tradition, and understanding the practices of faith matter deeply. Yet formation also happens through encounters: when another person's question interrupts our assumptions, when a familiar passage sounds different through someone else's experience, or when we discover that what helps one person participate creates a barrier for another.

Consider a discussion in which someone remains quiet. We might assume that person has little to contribute. But perhaps they are still discerning whether their questions will be welcomed. Perhaps the conversation moves too quickly, or the language assumes a familiarity with church life they have not yet developed. Rather than deciding what their silence means, we can make room and listen.

Across our diocese, we can approach formation with this same curiosity. Whose experiences shape the questions we ask? What do we assume about participants' time, resources, abilities, or knowledge? Are we prepared not only to welcome people into our gatherings, but also to let their presence shape how we learn together?

This attentiveness is not about knowing everything about another person. It begins with humility: recognizing that our own experience is not everyone's experience. We can receive another person's story without making it fit our own.

As we seek and serve Christ in one another, may we become more willing to notice, to ask, and to listen. The people beside us are not simply fellow recipients of a lesson. Their presence, questions, and experiences can become gifts through which we grow together in Christ.

Questions for Reflection

- How have my identity and experiences shaped the way I hear Scripture and participate in church?
- When have another person's questions helped me see something differently?
- What assumption about others might I need to reconsider?
- What is one change our formation gatherings could make to invite fuller participation?

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 Waiolaihuiʻia 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.