

From the Bishop

The Right Reverend Robert L. Fitzpatrick
The Episcopal Diocese of Hawai‘i



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A Reflection from the Bishop

I have recently been asked about the Pew Research Report: [Modeling the Future of Religion in America](#).

The report suggests that the United States will soon follow Western Europe in the loss of religious affiliation. The questions before us are, I think, twofold: (1) What does this mean for the future of the Church? (2) What are we – here I mean you and me, lay and clergy – to do about it, if anything?

First, let us set aside any notion that this is a problem to be fixed. It is a socio-cultural reality. Yes, it will have consequences. You and I are not called to fix it.

We are called to be faithful Disciples of Jesus Christ. We can do that by living individually and collectively into [the Five Marks of Mission](#):

1. To proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom
2. To teach, baptize and nurture new believers
3. To respond to human need by loving service
4. To transform unjust structures of society, to challenge violence of every kind and pursue peace and reconciliation
5. To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation, and sustain and renew the life of the earth

I do think that we – the Episcopal Church – sometimes expect someone (bishops, clergy, paid staff member, the vestry) to do that for us or to create a program to make something happen. That won’t happen. This is about each of us – you and me – being a Disciple.

As we are reminded in 1 Peter 3:14-16, we are each called: “But happy are you, even if you suffer because of righteousness! Don’t be terrified or upset by them. Instead, regard Christ the Lord as holy in your hearts. **Whenever anyone asks you to speak of your hope, be ready to defend it.** Yet do this with respectful humility, maintaining a good conscience. Act in this way so that those who malign your good lifestyle in Christ may be ashamed when they slander you.”

As Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 5:17-19: “So then, if anyone is in Christ, that person is part of the new creation. The old things have gone away, and look, new things have arrived! All of these new things are from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and who gave us the ministry of reconciliation. In other words, God was reconciling the world to himself through Christ, by not counting people’s sins against them. **He has trusted us with this message of reconciliation.**”

The primary ministry of every Disciple of Jesus Christ – every Baptized Christian, every Episcopalian in Hawai‘i, and not just the ordained – is to “proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom” by action and by sharing our faith. Our first responsibility is to share the Good

News of Jesus Christ. Everything else the Church does – including feeding the hungry and raising our voices for justice, gathering for worship and parties – must be grounded in our primary joy – knowing God in Jesus Christ – and our responsibility to share that joy with others.

You and I must be willing to share our faith – personally, one on one, and in the community. Please listen to Archbishop Stephen Cottrell's talk given to the Bishops at the recent Lambeth Conference (though listening to the whole session would be a benefit):

- [Video of Lambeth Conference plenary session on Mission and Evangelism](#). Please watch the whole video, but particularly listen to Archbishop Stephen Cottrell's talk beginning at 31:23 and ending at 1:04 (See also: [Transcript of Archbishop Stephen Cottrell's talk at the 2022 Lambeth Conference plenary on Mission and Evangelism](#)).

Do you know the joy of Christ Jesus? Is Christ alive in your life and home? Do you have anything to share? Is your church community something you even want to share? Transformation begins with each of us and in our local church family. Do you feel like a “new creation”? Does your own church family know your story of faith? Have you shared your story of faith with anyone? What can you do to ensure your local church community is a place you want to invite (urge) your friends, family members and even strangers to be a part of.

In the end, I am not worried about the loss of religion in the United States or even the decline of the institutional church. My responsibility is to you as God's people, and to remind you of our responsibility – individually and collectively – to live into God's Mission. I profoundly want the Diocese to be a joyful community in which everyone knows that they are loved by Jesus Christ and everyone – and you personally, are eager to share that love.

Blessings!

Bob

The Right Reverend Robert L. Fitzpatrick

(Pronouns: he, him, his)