

Growing in Grace: Formation Perspectives

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

Mutual Ministry: Forming the Church for the Work of All the Baptized

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

Last week, I had the opportunity to speak via Zoom with Emily Meeks from Virginia Theological Seminary (VTS). Emily serves with the Mutual Ministry Initiative (MMi) in VTS's Lifelong Learning Department and has been gathering data on formation programs across the wider Church. I was grateful for the chance to share about the Waiolaihui'ia Center for Ministry and to reflect together on the development of Mutual Ministry models in our denomination.

Since VTS's Lifelong Learning Department received a Lilly Endowment "Pathways for Tomorrow" grant in 2022 to launch MMi, I have been energized by the possibilities that shared ministry models hold for strengthening congregations and deepening our discipleship as followers of Christ.

Mutual Ministry invites us to reimagine the Church, not as a place where ministry is delivered to people, but as a community where ministry is shared among all the baptized. The ministry settings awaiting today's leaders are increasingly diverse. Current findings from the Mutual Ministry Initiative describe four common contexts: congregations with one or more full-time clergy and strong resources (ASA 150+), now only 6% of congregations and declining; churches with one full-time clergy and limited staff (ASA 50–150), 24% and declining; congregations with part-time clergy, sometimes serving multiple sites, and no other paid staff (ASA 25–50), 55% and declining; and lay-led faith communities with occasional priestly presence (ASA 1–25), 14% and rising. The communities our leaders are called to serve are not one-size-fits-all.

These realities are not simply challenges; they are invitations. Mutual Ministry, grounded in the ministry of all the baptized, aligns closely with Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD). Rather than beginning with scarcity, what we lack in numbers, clergy, or resources, ABCD begins with gifts. It invites us to notice the skills of parishioners, the lived wisdom of kūpuna, the energy of youth, the cultural richness of our congregations, and the relationships already woven into our neighborhoods. Mutual Ministry communities are multi-contextual and adaptive, sustained by creativity, collaboration, and trust in the Holy Spirit.

Formation is the soil where Mutual Ministry takes root. When formation helps people claim their baptismal identity, not simply as church members, but as ministers, new possibilities emerge. Intentional discipleship, spiritual gift discernment, theological reflection groups, and leadership development equip lay people to preach, teach, lead prayer, organize outreach, and engage their communities with confidence. Formation also reshapes clergy identity, from primary doers of

ministry to equippers, coaches, and discerners of gifts. In this way, Christian formation becomes leadership development for the whole Body of Christ.

Our congregations across the Diocese of Hawai‘i are rich in culture, language, music, and deep care for our communities. When we map our congregational assets and form people to recognize their callings, we move from maintenance to mission, from dependency to shared responsibility. Mutual Ministry revitalizes communities and deepens discipleship as each person discovers that daily life, family, work, service, and stewardship are indeed ways to participate in Christ’s ongoing work in the world.

Questions for Reflection:

- How is our formation helping people claim their baptismal vocation?
- What gifts in our congregations and neighborhoods remain unnamed?
- How might we intentionally form lay leaders for worship, teaching, and community engagement?
- How do we become communities that are lay-led and clergy-supported?
- Where could shared or collaborative ministry models strengthen our life across our diocese?

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.