

Bishop's Message: E-Chronicle, October 2015

"Why" Does the Episcopal Church Exist in Hawai'i?

Aloha o ke Akua:

I have just returned from a Project Resource conference in Denver. Project Resource is designed to turn a diocesan Bishop into a team leader of resource developers – teachers – who each have the training and digital resources to lead any church in any situation concerning resource development of money, vision or people – three great resources of a church's mission. I was blessed to have Keane Akao, David Gierlach, Kerith Harding, Wilma Namumnart and Peter Pereira with me.

In preparation for the gathering, we were asked to watch a TED Talk by Simon Sinek entitled, "How Great Leaders Inspire Action" (http://www.ted.com/talks/simon_sinek_how_great_leaders_inspire_action). Sinek has a simple model for inspirational leadership all starting with the simple question of "why?"

In preparation for the annual meeting of our Diocesan Convention on October 23-24, several long plane rides have allowed me to pray and ponder about the "why" of the Episcopal Diocese of Hawai'i. It seems to me that too often we get caught in the "how" or the "what."

We sometimes get caught up in the "what" of church. It is that Christian thing on Sunday mornings. It is the stuff of buildings and worship. It might be about doing good things like caring for the houseless. It might be about being the "Episcopal" Church in town, the church the Holy Sovereigns invited into the Kingdom, the church with the best organ and music in town, or the "nice and welcoming" church.

The "how" of our churches are the actions, programs, activities and style that define a congregation. It might be overly long exchanges of the peace or singing the "Queen's Prayer" after the absolution. It might be serving a lunch after worship each Sunday for the houseless. Being the Episcopal Church in town, it might just be the church that always prays from the Book of Common Prayer.

That is still not the “why” of being the Church. An individual might have a “why” that drives the whole congregation. If someone’s mother was a founding member of the congregation or a person’s father was once the priest, the driving “why” might be to preserve the past. Likewise the “why” of someone might be to preserve a building so their granddaughter will have a place to be married.

We confuse the “what” and “how” of being church with “why” we exist as the church of Jesus Christ.

In his book *Streams of Living Water: Celebrating the Great Traditions of Christ* (HarperOne, 2001), Richard J. Foster suggests there are six streams in Christianity that lead us to God in Jesus Christ:

- The Contemplative Tradition: Discovering the Prayer-Filled Life.
- The Holiness Tradition: Discovering the Virtuous Life.
- The Charismatic Tradition: Discovering the Spirit-Empowered Life.
- The Social Justice Tradition: Discovering the Compassionate Life.
- The Evangelical Tradition: Discovering the Word-Centered Life.
- The Incarnational Tradition: Discovering the Sacramental Life.

In the end, our “why” is God in Jesus Christ. We can see in Foster’s list the need to balance various aspects of worship, piety, service and study. These streams all lead us back to God in Jesus Christ.

We each have our own “why” of faith and of going to church. After my baptism in college, my “why” of church was caught up in the “what” and “how” of being an intellectually superior, liturgical Episcopalian. Soon after Bea and I married, we loaded a van and drove to New York City for me to attend seminary. My own “why” of faith changed after teaching in Nigeria and becoming very ill. Thanks to wise spiritual directors and days of reflection, I realized that I wanted everyone to know that they are the beloved of God. The anxiety and transience of the world ultimately doesn’t matter.

It was given language for me when I hear Elizabeth Moltmann-Wendel speak at Trinity Church, Wall Street, with her husband Jurgen Moltmann. Though speaking specifically to women as a feminist liberation theologian, her words cut into my core. She called us to understand that each of us is “good,” “whole” and “beautiful” by the very will of God. She said, “God needs us as

ones who have accepted themselves as good and whole and thus enabled to renew through themselves the disturbed and destroyed creation. God needs us as ones who are beautiful and who can break through the vicious cycle of self-hate and contempt of others.”

In Foster’s terms, I lean hard on the “Holiness Stream” of Christian life and faith. It “...focuses upon the inward re-formation of the heart and the development of ‘holy habits.’ We can rely upon these deeply ingrained habits of virtue to make our lives function appropriately and to bring forth substantial character formation.” For me, the “why” of Church is to live in a faithful community that can nurture “holy habits” in everyday life, and that can allow all of God’s children the experience of feeling and knowing that they are truly “Good, Whole and Beautiful”. The “what” and “how” of creating such a community are different, but the “why” is clear for me – love.

As a people of God in Jesus Christ, “why” does the Episcopal Diocese of Hawai‘i exist? “Why” is your congregation? At this upcoming Annual Meeting and over the next few months, we will focus on the “Why” of the Episcopal Church in Hawai‘i.

Aloha ma o Iesu Kristo, ko mākou Haku,
+Bob

The Right Reverend Robert L. Fitzpatrick
+ Keali‘ikoaokeakua