

## The Bishop's Report

Looking back over the past year, we have adapted to the reality of the COVID-19 Pandemic in amazing ways. It has not been easy. I began last year's Report with this reflection: "As I look over the past year, I am aware that these have been times unlike any we have personally experienced before. I was ordained a transitional deacon in 1986. Through the years, there have been recessions, small scale epidemics, and even wars. I began my episcopacy with the economic crash of 2007/2008. There has been nothing like the COVID-19 worldwide pandemic. Historians tell us that we have to look back to the Spanish Flu epidemic after World War I to find a similar time. Hawai'i has been particularly impacted. The economy is struggling with unemployment and an outlook for a long recovery." We have now gone nearly two years coming to grips as a world with this Pandemic. We have continued to be God's people. We have lived into Paul's admonition in 1 Corinthians 15:58 (from the Epistle in the Convention Eucharist): "[M]y loved brothers and sisters, you must stand firm, unshakable, excelling in the work of the Lord as always, because you know that your labor isn't going to be for nothing in the Lord."

Congregations have learned new ways of worship. We have become adept at online worship. Thanks to diocesan grants no congregation was prohibited from engaging virtual worship because of a lack of technology. I have been told by members of the Diocese that they attend online worship at more than one congregation on a Sunday or tune in throughout the week. I know some congregations have used my weekly Bible studies for online groups. We have learned how to engage in online education, fellowship, youth groups, and business meetings. It hasn't always gone smoothly, but we carried on.

When we could finally gather in-person, we had to navigate changes in directives and recommendations from various levels of government. God's people have been most patient and adaptable. We still aren't singing hymns altogether quite yet, but we can worship together again, and music again abounds. God's people have continued to step up to care for others in foodbanks, thrift shops, food giveaways, and many other ways. We are still being the Church only with masks and practicing social distancing. The vast majority of Episcopalians in this Diocese who are able have received the COVID-19 vaccination. Thank you. Things are hopeful.

I want to give a special word of thanks to the Clergy of our Diocese. Few ever thought that they would have to learn to produce online worship or manage the complications of social distancing and mask wearing. Many have become adept at pastoral care by computer monitor and telephone. We have gathered regularly for online conversations and retreats as a clergy 'ohana. We have had to balance family and self-care. I am very proud of the Clergy of the Diocese of Hawai'i. I am blessed.

The Diocesan Support Center staff have stepped up during the Pandemic with online trainings, retreats, and regular gatherings for communicators, administrators, thrift shop managers, wardens, clergy, those involved with H.R., and more. Special support was given helping congregations with the Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) loans/grants and the various grants available by county during the pandemic. The staff has done this while observing the requirements of the Pandemic and with some staff members continuing to work from home. I have been blessed by their diligence and ministry during this extraordinary time.

I have been able to begin visitations with fits and starts as the Pandemic impacted travel and in-person worship. The result has been my life has been spent on Zoom for Bible studies, clergy gatherings, board meetings, bishops' meetings, Diocesan Council, Standing Committee, etc. The 2021 General Convention of the Episcopal Church and the Lambeth Conference of Bishops of the

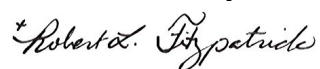
Anglican Communion were both postponed to 2022. With all that, it has been a year of renewal for me. I am healthier having lost 50 pounds and I have had a more focused prayer life. In addition, my granddaughter (Lisann Marie) was born in May.

As I consider the year overall, I do so reflecting on our Diocesan priorities to:

- *Commit to developing and sustaining spiritual growth, vitality, curiosity, and well-being within our churches.*<sup>1</sup> : There has been a dramatic increase in congregationally based online Bible studies, confirmation classes, weekday worship opportunities, and other formation programs. In many ways, the Pandemic has provided more options to people. This has included retreats for clergy and an additional new Waiolaihui‘ia offering (“Insight Space”) for those in discernment. We have missed being together.
- *Seek to strengthen our identity as one ‘ohana and the relationships within our ‘ohana among clergy, lay leaders and congregations.*<sup>2</sup> : As noted, this has largely been engaged through online activities. In many ways, folk have had more opportunities to engage in conversation than ever in our history as a Diocese. There have been more trainings. As a Diocese of islands, it is not easy to gather in-person. We will have to evaluate the effectiveness of these virtual encounters.
- *Focus on improving the capacity for communication within our congregations, across the Diocese, and into our communities as we engage in evangelism*<sup>3</sup> : There certainly have been more trainings about “communication” in the technical sense. There is a great deal of information shared by e-news (of the Diocese and congregations) and on the web. Is it effective?
- *Build God’s beloved community.*<sup>4</sup> :The Reconciliation Task Force has begun the work of helping us as a Diocese to look at racial reconciliation and justice in our Diocese and these Islands. This will include an initial conversation on racism at Education Day this year before the meeting of Convention.
- *Encourage and support care of God’s creation and environmental justice.*<sup>5</sup> : The Creation Care and Environmental Justice Task Force has begun the work of helping us as a Diocese to look at environmental reconciliation and justice in our Diocese and these Islands. This has included a resolution to come before this year’s meeting of Convention and a survey.

This year has given me new hope for the Episcopal Church in Hawai‘i. We have been resilient, unafraid, and faithful to Jesus Christ. As this Pandemic – God willing – wains, we will take that courage and faith into a new world that still needs to hear the Word of God’s Love. I will give Paul the last word: “I’m convinced that nothing can separate us from God’s love in Christ Jesus our Lord: not death or life, not angels or rulers, not present things or future things, not powers or height or depth, or any other thing that is created.” (Romans 8:38-39)

Submitted with my warm Aloha and blessing,



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

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<sup>1</sup> A priority of [2017 Strategic Plan](#).

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<sup>4</sup> A priority of The Episcopal Church (see [Becoming the Beloved Community](#)).

<sup>5</sup> A priority of The Episcopal Church (see [Creation Care](#)).