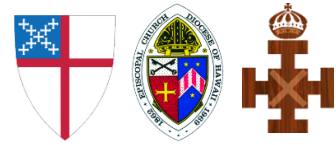


## From the Bishop

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



January 3, 2025

### A Note from the Bishop: A Diocesan Customary

Aloha my dear Siblings in Christ,

Among the many things on the Diocesan website there is page entitled [Forms and Documents](#) with extensive information. Under the heading “Sacrament,” you can find [A Diocesan Customary](#). This is filled with details about liturgical norms, information about visitations, expectations of clergy, and other items.

While the whole document might be helpful in understanding some practical aspects of being in the Episcopal Church, there are two items which I want the whole Diocese to consider. I share these because they are “hot” topics within the Episcopal Church. As your Bishop, I want you to know my understanding on these two matters:

- In item “**3. Holy Baptism and Holy Communion,**” I write:

*The Bishop assumes that the canon regarding Baptism and reception of Holy Communion will be followed throughout the Diocese. “No unbaptized person shall be eligible to receive Holy Communion” (Canon I.17.7). This can be stated positively as: “All baptized persons are welcome to receive the Holy Communion regardless of age or Christian tradition.” That being said, the clergy are not expected to be the “sacrament police.” The Episcopal Church has a clear teaching in which the gifts, promises, and responsibilities of Baptism are directly tied to the Lord’s Supper. The two great Sacraments are intimately interlinked. They are together the marks of being in the Body of Christ and have meaning beyond the individual. While a faithful believer might be called to the Table even before water Baptism – in Baptism of the Spirit – the normative practice of our Christian community has been to link the Table fellowship to our post-Baptismal life in Christ. The promises of Baptism and a new life in Christ ought not be imposed upon someone who has not willingly accepted them as an adult or who is not being raised in them through childhood having been baptized as an infant or young child. Table fellowship comes with the acclamation that “Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again” and that is a life-changing assertion. While this is the official teaching of our Church, it is also profoundly bound to the theology of the Baptismal Covenant and of the Book of Common Prayer 1979. The Episcopal Church practices “Open Communion” in that all the baptized Christians are welcome to the Table; we do not teach or practice “Communion of the Un-baptized.” We are calling folk into the joy, fellowship, and responsibilities of a new life in Christ Jesus.*

- And in item “**14. Marriage requirement for canonically resident Clergy and those in the ordination process**”:

*Marriage is the legal union of two persons who are bonded in a permanent, sexually exclusive personal partnership recognized by the Church and community. If an ordained person or candidate for ordination is cohabiting and presenting someone as a “life partner,” it is the Bishop’s expectation for the couple to be legally married before becoming canonically resident in this Diocese or before ordination now that civil and ecclesial marriage equality is a reality in Hawai‘i and Guam, and in the Episcopal Church. Why? Those ordained promise to pattern their life [and that of their family, or household, or community] in accordance with the teachings of Christ, so that they may be a wholesome example to God’s people. Marriage is the sacramental union of two persons before God. The Bishop commends the teaching of the Church entitled [“I Will Bless You, and You Will Be a Blessing”](#) for a further explication of the Episcopal Church’s teaching on marriage at this time.*

As the followers of Christ Jesus, there are different understandings and practices. Right now, I understand these to be the norms of the Episcopal Church. Bishops, Priests and Deacons promise in writing at every ordination to “solemnly engage to conform to the doctrine, discipline, and worship of the Episcopal Church.” That means following the Constitution and Canons of the Episcopal Church (and of our Diocese) and use the authorized liturgies of our Church including adhering to the rubrics (directions) in the Book of Common Prayers.

Our life as a Church has evolved through the centuries, but this is where we are right now on the subjects of the relation of Holy Baptism to the Holy Eucharist, and of marriage for those ordained (or discerning ordination).

Yours faithfully,

Bob