

From the Bishop

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



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An Epiphany Message from the Bishop

Aloha my dear Siblings in Christ Jesus,

Today, January 6, 2022, is both the Feast of the Epiphany of our Lord Jesus Christ and the first anniversary of the insurrection at the United States Capital. We are also fast approaching the second anniversary of the COVID pandemic as an international crisis.

The word “Epiphany” comes from the Greek *epiphaneia*, meaning “manifestation” or “appearance.” The word is used in 2 Timothy 1:9-10 to explain the believers’ relationship to God through Jesus Christ: “God is the one who saved and called us with a holy calling. This wasn’t based on what we have done, but it was based on his own purpose and grace that he gave us in Christ Jesus before time began. Now his grace is revealed through the **appearance** of our savior, Christ Jesus. He destroyed death and brought life and immortality into clear focus through the good news.” During the Season of the Epiphany, we are reminded how to “see” God through the lens of the life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ.

In recent weeks, I have been called on to explain how the Episcopal Church looks on God, Christ, and faith. The questions have come from completely unchurched individuals with no connection to any faith community (or a living family history of a faith tradition), and from others raised in a church (Roman Catholic and evangelical), but now lapsed. The questions have come in pre-marital counseling sessions, random conversations, and very specific contacts.

Upon reflection, I have explained what I think best explains how the Episcopal Church has come to express faith in God through Jesus Christ. How has the light of Christ shown to me through the Episcopal Church? How can I explain it to others? Here are my ten evolving “talking points”:

1. **The Bible** (the Hebrew Scripture [“Old Testament”] and the Apostolic Writings [“New Testament”]) provides the narrative basis of our faith showing us the presence of God in the stories of the Hebrew people, and the life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ and the impact he had on his first followers. The Bible cannot be taken literally but must be engaged through the writings’ historical context. We must struggle with the meaning – creative and harmful – of the text for our lives today as those who experience God through Jesus Christ.
2. **Through its worship and scholarship, the Episcopal Church maintains a deep respect for history and tradition.** This includes historic and current connections to the Anglican Communion and the Church of England, the pre-Reformation western Church

and the early Church. There is also a respect for the social and cultural experience of peoples from various cultures and nations that are part of the Episcopal Church today.

3. **Our tradition values reason.** The revelation of God in Jesus Christ through Scripture, tradition and creation can exist in harmony with reason. Scientific understanding can open us to the vast reality of the divine. We also understand that scientific knowledge changes with new discoveries. We are open to new possibilities.
4. **Tolerance and respect for another's beliefs is important.** This recognizes the possibility that "salvation" or "connection to the divine" can happen beyond any single path.
5. **There is an understanding of "original sin"** (human beings are limited, finite creatures that leads us in our weakness to hurt others [and ourselves] and to make harmful choices), **but not "original guilt"** (some type of universal condemnation from the moment of birth).
6. **The Episcopal Church teaches a respect for the natural order and goodness of creation.** Creation is neither our enemy nor something to be subdued. Human beings are interconnected with God's creation. Our sacramental life is grounded in the reality of life: Water and food (bread and wine), birth and death, confession and reconciliation.
7. **There is a healthy understanding that faith and works go together.** One has "to walk the walk and not just talk the talk." This fundamentally calls us to speak and act for justice and righteousness in our world. This requires self-reflection and mutual accountability.
8. **The Episcopal Church accepts a diversity of lifestyles.** This is grounded in the ongoing conversation with Scripture, tradition, scientific knowledge, and experience.
9. **There are a minimum number of basic "required" teachings in the Episcopal Church.** In fact, we have reduced them to four: (a) The Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, as "containing all things necessary to salvation," and as being the rule and ultimate standard of faith. (b) The Apostles' Creed, as the Baptismal Symbol; and the Nicene Creed, as the sufficient statement of the Christian faith. (c) The two Sacraments ordained by Christ Himself – Baptism and the Supper of the Lord – ministered with unfailing use of Christ's words of Institution and of the elements ordained by Him. (d) The Historic Episcopate, locally adapted in the methods of its administration to the varying needs of the nations and peoples called of God into the Unity of His Church. (See the Book of Common Prayer, pages 876-878.)
10. **The Episcopal Church has a dispersed system of authority that involves clergy and lay people.** There is no single final individual authority figure. Clergy – including bishops – do not exercise "monarchical" authority. Major decisions require the actions of elected bodies that include clergy and lay members.

These ten points are not exhaustive. These are my ten points right now.

If you were to make a list, what would you include? If someone walked up to you today, how would you explain the Episcopal Church and why you are an Episcopalian? During these difficult times, how has your faith – specifically as an Episcopalian – helped you? How does the Episcopal Church light your way to God through Jesus Christ?

As we come through the Pandemic and continue to engage a nation in conflict, we can be clear on our basic understanding of faith and how that faith mirrors Christ’s light in our lives.

I really do want to hear from you! Send your “talking points” or comments to me at [Bishop Bob's Jotform](#).

O God, by the leading of a star you manifested your only Son to the peoples of the earth: Lead us, who know you now by faith, to your presence, where we may see your glory face to face; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. *Amen.*

Epiphanytide Blessings!

+Bob

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