

*The Rev. Heather Patton-Graham, Chaplain  
'Iolani School, Lower School*

**“We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church.”  
*one holy catholic apostolic***

Unlike, perhaps, anything else we do when we are together gathered for worship and the Eucharist, the recitation of the Nicene Creed unites us with Christians near and far, not just our neighbors in the Episcopal church across town, or any Episcopal Diocese anywhere, but with brother and sister Christians, globally. This, the only existing ecumenical statement of faith crafted and accepted what seems like eons ago, the Nicene Creed is foundational. It is bedrock. It is our solid footing, more or less our ‘Constitution.’

As a quartet together, the four qualities of being “Church,” as spelled out in the Creed- one, holy, catholic, apostolic- are called “The Four Marks of the Church,” and they work in concert with one another to describe our unique Episcopal expression of Church. Our branch of the Jesus Movement is, at its beginning and ending, unified, all-encompassing, and endowed through time and history with a connective thread through those who have gone before us straight to Jesus Christ, and that thread is indissoluble. Generation after generation after generation, we, as Church, are as close to Christ as we can be now, and as we ever have been, because of this thread.

This is what we (as Church) believe in when it comes to being Church.

At our best, this is who we are, and, at the same time, because of the sheer reality of being on this side of Paradise, this is still who we are striving to become. We know that not all of Christianity is unified and not all Christians are all-embracing. In some cases, there are those who self-identify and proclaim themselves as Christians who are not clear on the need for a connection to Jesus Christ and the Gospel of love, forgiveness, grace, and justice; yet, our Creed gives this to us, the Church, week after week, Eucharist after Eucharist, as foundation and vision.

What is wonderfully present in these “marks” is a vision of a wholeness as global community, embraced by a faithful Church. This global community is graceful and grace-filled. If we, as Church, are unified and all-embracing, connected to and through Jesus Christ, then the love, forgiveness, and justice embodied for us in Jesus Christ, and passed on to us as our work to do, will transform society, will change lives, will bond us with our brothers and sisters of all faiths and of no faith.

It is our foundation and our vision.

Now, as a school Chaplain, it is a bit of a curious thing to consider these “marks.” There is no question that our school was founded on Christian principles; it is in our charter, writ through our

school history and practice, and it is even in the first sentence and phrases of our mission statement:

'Iolani School is a coeducational, college-preparatory school for grades K–12 founded upon Christian principles...‘Iolani is committed to the following ideal[s]: An education which reflects its Episcopal Church heritage and provides a spiritual foundation for the development of personal values and moral integrity...’<sup>1</sup>

We pray, sing, study, and reach out into our community, much like congregations all over the Diocese, and we use the same hymnal and books which our congregations use. However, in our unique community, we are not Church in this creedal way. Rather, it is because of the Church’s creedal way that we even exist. This foundation and vision of a unified community, all-embracing, with deep connection to the love, forgiveness, and justice of scripture and lived through the life of Jesus Christ, is what is at the core of our purpose as ‘school.’

In answering the question, “What are the distinguishing qualities that identify a school as Episcopal?” The National Association of Episcopal Schools offers this definition:

[Episcopal schools] are Christian communities whose missions integrate spiritual formation into all aspects of the educational experience. Episcopal schools are most distinctive when they are true to this mission and when they do so in the graceful and inclusive manner which is the hallmark of the Anglican approach to education over the centuries. As embodiments of the Christian faith, Episcopal schools are created to be communities that honor, celebrate and worship God as the center of life. They are created to be models of God’s love and grace. They are created to serve God in Christ in all persons, regardless of origin, background, ability, or religion.<sup>2</sup>

We are intentionally, purposefully, and missionally pluralistic centers of learning and formation. “Episcopal schools have been established... not solely as communities for Christians, like a parish church, but as ecumenical and diverse ministries of educational and human formation for people of all faiths and backgrounds.”<sup>3</sup> We are a congregation that is made up of a multi-faith, ecumenical, some agnostic, some atheist, thoroughly global and diverse community, and we are able to be and do as such because of those marks, and our Creedal foundation and vision of being Church as one, holy, catholic, and apostolic. We walk with our students on whatever and whichever journey they are on, be it one of faith, or discovery of self, or discovery of faith.

Jesus modeled this living for us. The Gospels are replete with accounts of his teachings and miracles, and they are full of his moments with people who he encountered on the Way, people from different places, with different ideas and different understandings, as well as people filled with questions, searching for truth, and working through doubt.

Former Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, in his address to the Third Global South to South Encounter in October 2005, offered this:

---

<sup>1</sup> [https://www.iolani.org/uploaded/PDF/2016-17\\_Family\\_Handbook.pdf](https://www.iolani.org/uploaded/PDF/2016-17_Family_Handbook.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.episcopalschools.org/episcopal-schools/episcopal-identity>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.episcopalschools.org/episcopal-schools/episcopal-identity>

But the simple thing I want to say is that all four marks of the church are about Jesus Christ. The church is one because Jesus Christ is one; the church is holy because Jesus Christ is holy; the church is catholic because Jesus Christ is the saviour of all; the church is apostolic because, as the Father has sent Jesus, so Jesus sends us. In other words, if we are to understand the nature of the church at all, we are to understand who Jesus Christ is and what he does.<sup>4</sup>

There is an old story that is told around campus here at school concerning Sun Yat-sen, our most famous alumnus, father of modern China. When Dr. Sun walked onto campus in 1879 as a 13-year-old boarding student, it was his first time to be immersed in an English-speaking environment, but also his first time surrounded by Western ideas and ideals, including Christianity and Chapel. The story goes that the school received a letter from his brother, asking for the young Dr. Sun to be excused from Chapel because he was not Christian, but the headmaster told the family no, and Dr. Sun attended Chapel with his brother students from all walks of life and backgrounds. (There is even one version of the story that recounts Dr. Sun saying that he really enjoyed Chapel and all that he gained from that time with his classmates.)

Later in his life, when asked about his education in the United States, Dr. Sun “has said that his ideas came from three main sources: ‘Chinese traditional culture, Western ideas, and his own thoughts; but that Western ideas prevailed.’<sup>5</sup>

Let’s hear it for an Episcopal liberal arts education!

We are the Episcopal branch of the Jesus Movement. We believe in one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church, and this invitation to approach the wideness of our global community creates moments and places within our church, like the Episcopal schools we have in our own Diocese. In our schools we live these creedal “marks” each and every day as we encounter students and families from different places, with a variety of ideas and understandings, as they are on their way, and we walk with them and explore their questions, engage their searching for truth, and work with them in their doubt, just as Jesus did.

---

<sup>4</sup> <http://aoc2013.brix.fatbeehive.com/articles.php/1675/one-holy-catholic-and-apostolic-church>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.iolani.org/about/history-of-iolani/dr-sun-yat-sen>