

The Spire

Photograph by: Rev. Brandon Durán

Central Union Church and Preschool

“We Engage and Embrace ALL as we seek to Embody Christ!”

March 2021

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Pastor's Page

Rev. Brandon Durán, *Acting Senior Minister*

While visiting my parents I had the honor of officiating their vow renewal ceremony. March marks their 38th wedding anniversary. With the help of their church, my parents pulled together a small celebration at their home. My mother brought out her wedding dress, a friend baked a cake modeled on their original wedding cake, and a photo album of their wedding day was on display for all.

There was something enchanting about flipping through the slightly faded pictures carefully secured on the crinkly pages. The images revitalized memories and inspired people to retell stories buried by time and tasks. On that occasion of anniversary and promise, we started the ceremony by reflecting on what had been. Remembering the past brought gravitas to the present and hope for the future.

In March of 2020 Honolulu shut down because of COVID-19. We began a new way of life that has lasted longer than many expected. COVID-19 has touched all of our lives in one way or another and, by God's grace, we have endured. In this month's Spire we share snapshots of how Central Union Church has responded to this pandemic. We look back because we believe that even in challenging times God is faithful. We remember in order to discover new reasons to praise God for the ways we have been delivered and blessed. We remember in order to renew the baptismal promises we have made to one another and to God.

The Bible, particularly Psalm 71 speaks beautifully about this saying,

"As for me, I will always have hope; I will praise you more and more.

My mouth will tell of your righteous deeds, of your saving acts all day long— though I know not how to relate them all.

I will come and proclaim your mighty acts, Sovereign Lord; I will proclaim your righteous deeds, yours alone.

Since my youth, God, you have taught me, and to this day I declare your marvelous deeds.

Even when I am old and gray, do not forsake me, my God, till I declare your power to the next generation, your mighty acts to all who are to come."

The language of "righteous deeds", "mighty acts", and "marvelous deeds" may bring to mind the ancient grandiose miracles of the Old Testament. However, God is just as present in our day and in our stories. The Almighty continues to do marvelous things through you and through your church. May the testimonies and snapshots included in this issue of the Spire reveal just how faithful God has been and reinvigorate us with God's promise to never leave us or forsake us. To God be the glory. Amen.



Council Talking Points

Martha Balkin, *Council Chair*

Isaiah 35 *The desert and the parched land will be glad;
the wilderness will rejoice and blossom.*

*Like the crocus, 2 it will burst into bloom;
it will rejoice greatly and shout for joy.*



During the pandemic, I have been trying to grow different plants with varying degrees of success. I have never had much of a green thumb. Recently, I decided to sprout an avocado seed. I followed the directions I found online, washed it, wrapped it in a wet paper towel, stuck it in a Ziploc bag and put it away in the pantry. Every few days I check and I am thrilled to see life bursting forth – the seed has cracked open and a root is beginning to emerge.

I read a comment online recently that the whole year 2020 has felt like Lent – we have given things up, we’ve waited, we’ve prepared. We are eager for life to burst forth again. We are an Easter people and we believe that God is always at work, even during the dark days when it feels that things are dormant. We trust God’s presence is stirring at Central Union Church.

Here are some highlights from this month’s Council meeting.

Central Union Preschool

Veronique Braithwaite reported that the Fall enrollment for admissions is just about complete. While fundraising efforts were curtailed this past year during the pandemic, the need for financial assistance to families has increased. The Council voted to transfer excess preschool funds from the 2019-2020 school year to funding scholarships in the 2021-2022 school year, to support the needs of Preschool families.

Reopening

In-person worship continues and we have located a resource for individual consumption communion cups and wafers. This enabled communion during the in-person service while maintaining safety protocols. The move to Tier 3 will bring further changes.

Payroll Protection Program 2

Central Union was approved for a second draw of Payroll Protection Program funds of the forgivable loan/grant. These funds will be used specifically for items as required by the PPP loan/grant documents to have the funding qualify as a grant.

Bylaws

A Learning Tree webinar was held on February 14, 2021 to discuss proposed revisions to the Bylaws. The Bylaws Committee is currently in a comment period and is receiving questions and comments from the Congregation. The committee continues to meet weekly to discuss and make appropriate adjustments based on members’ feedback. Since the Council meeting, two more Learning Trees have been planned – a live, in-person Learning Tree to be held in the Sanctuary on March 14th and another Learning Tree Webinar to be held on March 21st. They are looking forward to a Special Meeting of the Church to consider approval of the Bylaws.

COVID Reflections

Which aloha shirt should I wear to service this week?”. Hard to imagine it’s been over a year since Jimmy has had much reason to wear a shirt with buttons. Like it was for many others, 2020 was a year of challenges for our ‘ohana. We opened a new frozen dessert shop just weeks before the stay-at-home order. Kathy had to adjust to technical and motivational challenges of teaching remotely. The keiki became fixtures at Aloha Tower Marketplace, the location of our family shop, as they took part in distance learning (“work-schooling” TM) among the HPU university students.

While the Zoom services have kept us connected with CUC, they do not replace the community and fellowship of in-person worship. We miss the connection with the CUC community at large, the sharing of Aloha, and children’s ministry. But over the past year we experienced the essence of the church all around us. We saw the spirit of the Lord in the generosity of the people who supported us, be it the customers and landlord at our store, the parents and staff of Kathy’s school, or the hardworking and patient instructors and coaches for our own children.

We look forward to being regular in-person at Central Union Church again. Jimmy is especially ready to put on his Reyn Spooner shirts again.

The Louie ‘Ohana

I see God at work at Central Union Church through all of the different zoom opportunities to reach out to others. I hope that many of these will continue as things get back to “normal”. I have learned so much about others that I never would have known by just sitting with them in a church service. I’ve also met many other members through our Serving Aloha outreach. **Carolyn Kuahulu**

For me, throughout the span of this pandemic, COVID-19 has reminded me of my mortality. I told Lisa, “It’s been like Ash Wednesday,” to which she replied, “It’s been like a year-long Ash Wednesday.” Even with the arrival of vaccines and Hawaii’s very low positivity rate, the danger is still there and we all need to continue to be cautious. As much as I cling to my precious life and all that I love in it, I know that God still loves the world and we can never be lost to God. When faced with our mortality, trusting that God will always be present with us, in life and in death, helps a lot. I am looking forward to when we can gather as a congregation and sing the hymns of our faith and be reminded that “love never faileth.” What a joy that will be! **Steve Haley**

My reflection this past year is one of adjustment for all and also a sense of pride of what we accomplished as a preschool. We were in-house for summer school and in-house starting in August 5 full days a week. Our church and preschool community continued to remain open and be creative under Veronique’s leadership and guidance along with all the support of the staff. I am so proud and grateful of our CUPS community adjusting so that we could continue working through Covid.

Anonymous

What it means to be “the Church” is amplified by the current issues. Since God allows what is, for reasons well above my pay grade, it’s as if a RESET button has been pressed. Every facet of existence seems influenced by the pandemic. Followers of Christ, at our best, are in contrast to the world, because we have this...we’ve identified Christ and His character as the true North of our compass, and our choices reflect this. The World, by contrast, has no clear North to navigate by, and we see the results... confusion and heartache everywhere. What the Spirit seems to underscore for me is how grateful I am to know Him (as imperfectly as I do) and that I’d like others to share that blessing, both within and outside the body of Christ. That’s a relatively sharpened realization for me, I guess. I hope that when all of this is over, we hold on to the realization that everyday living is precious, fragile, and revocable. What used to seem like a thick wall between life and death is actually a duality that’s paper-thin. **Mark Norseth**

C COVID-19 has really changed our lives. Glenn, personally, feels so close to so many people at CUC, AND so close to people that are far away on the Mainland. As he likes to say, "God knocking on my door". He has written over 1,000 letters to his veteran friends, to CUC members, to family and friends on the Mainland. He also calls them and has started to FaceTime with them or connect them to other people. We have both read many books during this year.....we feel smarter!

When CUC opened up to in-person church services at the end of October, 2020, we felt safe coming again to our beloved space. The care that was taken to be sure everyone stayed healthy was amazing and wonderful to see, and we HAVE stayed healthy!

Music has been Connie's outreach--it helps her AND I believe it helps others! Being at Central Union (even COVID TIMES ONLINE) all these years continually inspires us about GOD'S LOVE! MEGA MEGA MAHALO, Ministers, Staffers and members!

Glenn and Connie Uejio

What I miss most of the church precovid is seeing and hugging my friends and pastors. This is very hard to do on Zoom. Also I miss being in our beautiful sanctuary. I have learned that to be the church is just to gather together - does not need to be in person. Taking communion via Zoom was very meaningful to me. I often wondered what others were using as the bread and wine! When we can meet again in person, I hope we rememb how we coped with the restrictions and still felt we were a family. God is at work in CUC every day keeping us together in body and spirit.

Jackie Lane

I can only speak for my Mom and I and the absolutely wonderful experience we have and with CUW. Essentially, in my opinion, overall what we lost in direct contact was by far strengthened in CUW collaborative faith that the Lord wanted us to keep moving forward and helping "shine our light" together. My faith was strengthened because I perceived the Lord wanted and gave me the time to step up and figure out how to lead on Zoom, oversee Advent and what has now become a very special contemplative payer group. I believe we need to continue some aspects of what we do via an online platform.

Joda Derrickson

Reflecting on 2020, it was a very challenging year for our family. Everything came to a screeching halt, from education to employment and even gathering for worship. Yet in the midst of all these unexpected events, we found God's promise of being with us.

Who would imagine we could worship online with participation from the entire church, from youth to elders, music from traditional to contemporary, teaching of His Words via internet? Of the thirty somewhat years we attended CUC, we have never participated and met so many members in so many activities --- morning prayer meetings, mini-K groups, Aloha Lanai, in-person worship, Serving Aloha and the latest Lenten study.

The church has not ceased its ministries. As a matter of fact, the church rose to answer the call to service. We delivered little Valentine gifts to our kupuna and helped feed the needy through Help is on the way and Serving Aloha.

Participating in "Serving Aloha" gave us the chance to bond not only with members of our church from different services, but also getting to know members of other churches as we serve God side by side, week after week. This opportunity to serve is rewarding and will be missed and remembered post COVID.

Our prayer is that as life resume its normalcy, we as a church will continue to grow capturing the new experiences that brought us closer together as God's people.

Veronica Cheung, Raymond and Eva Yeung, Fanny Yeung

What I miss most about pre-COVID church is our singing together and our gathering together to experience taking communion as a body. But now, church to me is now even more about relationships. I treasure the small group Kit and I am a part of. Friends that you actually pray WITH as well as FOR seem special. And I love the Zoom Aloha Lanais. I feel as if I am getting to truly know people. Keith is doing a fantastic job! In fact, I am now seeing the church as a web of relationships. The denser the web the healthier the church. I hope that we search for anything we can do to facilitate connections.

I see God working in many ways through many people and I love that. I feel that God has given each of us a calling . . . something that calls to us. Something that makes us happy to be doing it. But, the Serving Aloha stands out to me as that activity which makes me SEE God at work.

Margie Smith

I miss every Sunday greeting everyone as they come to worship – that is where I share the love of Jesus. I miss the hugs, smiles, and connection, but I was eager to write cards to people on the care list. That has been a great blessing for me, especially because some have responded telling me what a blessing it was to them. I hope we continue this personal outreach. Writing them made me think of others who I felt needed a surprise blessing, too. This year, I had more phone calls on a personal level than ever before. The one-on-one interaction has been wonderful.

Our Women’s Prayer group meets via Zoom and now our members who moved to the mainland can join us each week. It is wonderful to have them with us again. Some ministries should stay online! I hope when we reopen, we can record one of our services so that those who can’t come to worship can still participate in this new way.

I am thrilled that we have members who have started our Serving Aloha food ministry! I hope that when we reopen, we can have opportunities to be present with, pray for, and share Christ with those who need an extra touch. I hope we can start even more prayer groups and Bible studies, too! Thank you to our church members for being God’s hands, feet, and voice in the world! **Carolyn Winston**

The sanitization has been back- breaking!! However , since implementing it there has been alot less sniffles and illness in our room! Practically none at all...teachers and keiki both. So the increased awareness and mask wearing has been worth it!!

I’m glad I got the chance to adapt....much better than getting sick! Also I’m glad I have been a part of CUPS....I think we have gotten through this well.

Maureen, CUPS Green Cottage Teacher

By The Numbers

Care Calls by staff and volunteers – **3,347**

Care Cards Sent – **450**

Classes: **546** faith formation classes

-Wednesday Night group – SoG	-Young Adult
-Youth	-Keiki
-Mini-K groups	-First Things
-Men’s Bible Study	-Women’s Prayer Group
-Centering Prayer	-Walking Moais
-Bamboo Stick Class with Marion	-Cassie Chee’s Class
-Gary Hoover’s Class	-Lloyd Lim’s Class

Families served at Serving Aloha – **6,615**

Help Is On the Way Food drives – **7**

Meals served at Next Step, Keahou Shelter – **1,920** meals

Weddings – **4**

Baptisms – **10**

Funerals/Burials – **9**

Deaths in our church – **25**

Preschool Temperature Checks this year – **21,136**

Food/Prescription/Mask Deliveries – **125+**

-Groceries, prescriptions, masks, Valentine’s Day packages, Easter Lilies

Worship During COVID

13 Services on the Great Lawn and Drive-Thru Celebrations

54 Online Services (over 100 when including Pohnpei Ministry and CUW Ministry services)

Easter Services

6:00am - Drive-In Sunrise Service

9:00am - In-Person Service

10:00am - Online Service

Proposed Bylaws and Standing Rules

Bylaws Committee

In response to feedback from members, the Bylaws Committee has modified the schedule for review and feedback on the proposed revisions to the Bylaws and Standing Rules. Additional time for review and additional discussion forums have been added. The new schedule is as follows:

March 2: SECOND draft of revisions to the proposed Bylaws and Standing Rules (in clean and redline formats), along with responses to Frequently Asked Questions, will be provided to members (see below)

March 2-13: Additional 12-day period for members to provide comments and questions on the SECOND draft of revisions to proposed Bylaws and Standing Rules

March 7: Live Learning Tree at Central Union Windward following the 10:00am Service to discuss the SECOND draft and to respond to questions from members

March 14: Live Learning Tree in the Sanctuary at 11:00am to discuss the SECOND draft and to respond to questions from members

March 17: Bylaws Committee will provide to members THIRD draft of revisions to the proposed Bylaws and Standing Rules (in clean, and redline formats)

March 17-20: Additional 4-day period for members to provide comments on the THIRD draft of revisions to proposed Bylaws and Standing Rules

March 21: Additional Learning Tree Webinar to be held at 11:00am to discuss the THIRD draft and to respond to questions from members

March 22: Final deadline for member feedback to the proposed Bylaws and Standing Rules

March 29: Notice of Special Meeting on the proposed Bylaws and Standing Rules to be distributed to members (which will include a link to the final draft of the proposed Bylaws and Standing Rules)

April 18: Special Meeting of the Congregation to vote on the proposed Bylaws and Standing Rules

The Bylaws Committee has reviewed, discussed, and prayerfully considered all questions and comments received. We note that several of the comments and questions overlapped so while you may not find the wording of your specific comment or question in the Responses to Frequently Asked Questions, we believe we have responded to all comments and questions in the Responses to Frequently Asked Questions. It is our intent and hope that this document contributes to a greater understanding of the proposed changes. The committee continues to welcome feedback.

To make your voice heard, please email your comments and questions to bylaws@centralunionchurch.org. All comments have and will continue to be carefully and prayerfully considered. You may obtain a copy of the Second draft of the proposed Bylaws and Standing Rules (in clean and redline formats) and the Responses to Frequently Asked Questions by visiting the NEWS section of the CUC website, or by contacting Natasha Dator at natasha-dator@centralunionchurch.org or 440-3004. And if you missed the first Bylaws Learning Tree Webinar presentation on February 14th explaining proposed changes, you may watch it by visiting the NEWS section of the CUC website.

HOLY WEEK

PALM SUNDAY - MARCH 28

MAUNDY THURSDAY - APRIL 1

GOOD FRIDAY - APRIL 2

EASTER - APRIL 4

LATEST INFORMATION ABOUT WORSHIP TIMES AND LOCATIONS WILL BE POSTED ON THE CUC WEBSITE

LOVE NEVER FAILETH