



# *The Spire*

Photograph by: Kristen Young

Central Union Church and Preschool

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

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# Pastor's Page

**Rev. Brandon Durán, Acting Senior Minister**

Just before the conclusion of his time as our youth pastor, our leader gave each youth a parting blessing. The blessing he gave me was a homemade plaque with Silly Putty

of stained wood. He wrote a scripture verse beneath the accidental amorphous toy once used as a tool on the Apollo 8 mission. It read:

"Do not be conformed to the patterns of this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind."  
– Romans 12:2a

I think about that gift every so often, especially during the season of Epiphany. The Christian season of Epiphany covers the first two months of the year bridging the abundant joy of Christmas and the austere journey of Lent. Yet Epiphany is more than a middle ground, it is a time of insight, discovery, and inspiration.

It is easy to think of an epiphany as a spontaneous occurrence, a lightning bolt idea, or an unexpected revelation. However, in the Bible, epiphanies are built upon background work. During the season of Epiphany we retell three stories that reveal how the stage is set for the "renewing of mind."

**The Visit of the Magi:** The Magi did not accidentally stumble over Christ. The revelation of the Messiah came to the Magi because they had been studying ancient texts and they kept their eyes to the heavens. The Magi maintained their conviction that there was truth beyond their corner of the world. Their sudden insight and understanding was built upon the time they invested searching for understanding.

**The Blessing of Anna and Simeon:** When Mary and Joseph brought the infant Jesus to the temple

the baby was greeted and blessed by the prophet Anna and Simeon. God had promised Simeon that he would see the consolation of Israel before he died. Anna and Simeon encountered Jesus and had insight into God's plan because they faithfully worshipped God. They went to the temple daily and listened to the Holy Spirit's leading. Because of this they were ready to receive their epiphany.

**The Baptism of Jesus:** When Jesus was baptized the Spirit of God descended and God proclaimed, "this is my beloved son in whom I am pleased." John the Baptist witnessed this epiphany because he consented to baptize Jesus. John was hesitant at first but he listened to Jesus guidance, followed his call, and was blessed with insight.

We cannot force an epiphany but that does not mean we should be passive like Silly Putty waiting for external forces to shape us. We can be intentional and actively lay the ground work for Holy Spirit to transform our thinking and renew our perspective. Through cultivating a spirit of openness and curiosity; through study of the scriptures; through honest worship; through faithfulness to our call to serve and bless; through all of this and more we prepare ourselves to be utterly amazed by the Holy Spirit.

This season of Epiphany let us be open to a new insight, a different perspective, a renewal of our thinking. Let us cultivate practices that prepare us to hear the Holy Spirit say, "Have you thought about this?" This season may we "be transformed by the renewing of our minds, so that we may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect."



# Council Talking Points

Martha Balkin, Council Chair

*Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. 8 Love never fails. 1 Corinthians 13:4-8*

One of the joys of serving as Council Chair is being witness to the many, many ways our church is living into this call to love. One example occurs each week at Serving Aloha; we offer a prayer card for those who want to receive this blessing. Prayers have been written by Carolyn Winston and Evie Hao. Pixie St. Denis hands out the cards after guests have received their food. She shared that one guest said the food feeds his body, but the prayer card feeds his heart. Amen to that! What more can we as a church hope for, than to be a place of spiritual nourishment. The following prayer was written by Evie Hao and shared this past week. I hope these words speak to all our hearts and inspire our actions in this coming year.

**Lord**, We ask for your wisdom, for your strength and power to be constantly present within us. We pray you would make us strong and courageous for the road ahead. Give us ability beyond what we feel able, let your gifts flow freely through us, so that you would be honored by our lives. **Amen**

Here are some notes from the Council this month:

**Central Union Preschool** is currently going through the Admissions process for the Preschool and Toddler program. CUPS has been working through the current COVID surge by staying in communication with preschool families, the Hawaii Department of Health and the Department of Human Services. CUPS is also working with the Buildings and Grounds Staff and Committee to address campus needs.

During Advent, our **Youth** partnered with Church of the Crossroads and Lānaʻi Union Church to host a 3-session online Advent activity for youth (based on A Christmas Carol) and in late December went on an outing to see Christmas lights. In January, there was an outing to Waimea Valley for a mālama ʻāina service-learning activity. The youth also joined a larger community group on the MLK holiday. The vaccine clinic with Healthy Mothers Healthy Babies is scheduled for January 30 (after budget meeting)

and the youth are planning to hold a modified “parking fundraiser” in conjunction with modified Punahou Carnival on February 4.

The **Women’s League** is thankful for the hiring of a permanent staff manager of the Honolulu Thrift Shop and especially thankful to Joan Murata for her leadership and service as the Temporary Volunteer Thrift Shop Manager for over the past year. The Thrift Shop sustained damage during the December rainstorm. While repairs made earlier this year held, other concerns surfaced and are being addressed by the Buildings and Grounds staff and Committee.

**Central Union Windward** - Conversations are underway for a sister UCC congregation to share sanctuary and Sunday School space at Central Union Windward. The Thrift Shop has made a permanent move and now occupies the entire mauka wing, opening the Fellowship Hall to be used by other groups. The Thrift Shop has made donations to community organizations and is also donating clothing to CUW Food pantry clients that are in need. Regular supply minister, the Reverend Dr. Richard Walenta, was away on a trip to visit family during the Fall. During his absence, the following people filled the pulpit: Rev. Lauren Medeiros, Rev. Alpha Goto, Rebecca Woodland, Ken Harding, Rev. Brandon Duran and most recently Malia Galindo.

In January, **Serving Aloha** has averaged around 500 households served each week. The combination of walk up and drive through food distribution is working well. Volunteers are needed. There are usually between 40 and 50 volunteers participating each Wednesday, including church members, those from the community and other churches.

The Council has formed an **Ad-hoc Fundraising Committee** to generate and evaluate new ideas to enhance revenues. The committee has been charged to think “outside the box”, to develop creative ideas, that also create opportunities to produce an effective return on investment.





# Youth Gather to Mālama ‘Āina

**Kristen Young, Youth Director**

**E**arly morning on Monday, January 17th, a small group of high school youth and college students from Central Union made their way to Waimea Valley to join in service with dozens of others from the community. It was the day when we remember and honor the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. (MLK). The day also marked 129 years since the illegal overthrow of the Hawaiian Kingdom.

In MLK's last Christmas sermon, he shared, "We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied to a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly." This concept of mutuality that MLK spoke of can be seen in our focus for the day: **mālama ‘āina**, which Native Hawaiians live by, which we all must live by—we care for the land and the land cares for us. Indeed, it was a special day to be together and connect with the ‘āina that has sustained us to the present.

"Spending the day with the breathtaking ‘āina of Waimea Valley was definitely an experience I'll never forget. The opportunity to mālama our ‘āina in one of the most sacred places, originally for the highest kahuna, put into perspective how important the work we did was. Not only for the ecosystem there, but the cultural significance of where we were. Getting our hands dirty pulling out and removing invasive species from the botanical gardens for hours was well worth it to see the falls at the end that left me in awe of how beautiful our home is. It is our responsibility to keep it that way."

—Makenna Kinsler

*Mahalo to our chaperones who accompanied us and made this day possible!*







# Water Project Completed

*These tanks supply Thembelile High School. Teachers housing front and school in the distance. Water is also for the primary school.*

**Margie Smith, World Mission**

**T**he World Mission Committee relays thanks from the entire community of **Ncangosini eSwatini, Africa** to the loving and generous congregation of Central Union Church for the Water Project that has given them water security.

## ***How it came together:***

In March of 2020 our caring congregation raised over \$11,000 to fund a water project for the community of Ncangosine in Eswatini Africa. This project would ensure that the community had water at their disposal through wells and reliable piping. Unfortunately, when COVID struck, every thing came to a halt. Then in 2021 work resumed, and now there is a comprehensive water supply for the entire community.



*Pictured is one of the many farms/gardens benefiting from a dependable water supply.*





# Healthy People, Healthy Communities: Protecting Our Loved Ones through Vaccination

**Kristen Young, Youth Director**

The availability of the COVID-19 vaccines has allowed many of us to resume 'pre-pandemic' activities with an added layer of protection and sense of safety. As a church, we value community and being together, we strive to love our neighbors, so we encourage those who are eligible for the COVID-19 vaccines to get vaccinated as a way to live out our faith and care for the community.

We are grateful for *Healthy Mothers Healthy Babies Coalition of Hawai'i* and their willingness to partner with us to make vaccines more accessible to those in our community through a mobile clinic stationed in our parking lot. They've worked with us to host three clinics where nearly 100 people made the choice to get vaccinated! First and second COVID vaccine doses, boosters, and flu shots were available at no charge to the patients who ranged from keiki to kūpuna.



## Central Union Windward Thrift Shop

**Joan Bennett, Thrift Shop Manager**

We are all enjoying the wonderful relationships developing at the thrift shop at windward church. We have been open now for slightly more than six months and the response to our shop has been fabulous and very welcoming to the Windward side. Our income for those six months has exceeded \$18,000, which is marvelous. As we continue to

develop and grow we hope that our relationship will help whoever enter the shop in their journey in life—especially with the Lord. Much praise and thanks to our thrift shop in town for tons of wonderful donations in our initial weeks—working together is a true joy!!!

# White Gifts Report 2021

**Rebecca Woodland**, *White Gifts Chair*

**H**appy New Year! With joy and gratitude I am thrilled to report that our amended White Gifts project was again a huge success. Although pandemic precautions prevented us from holding the pageant, your generous monetary donations made it possible for this long-standing tradition of Central Union Church to continue. Over 800 gifts were purchased to fill specific requests of seven local social service agencies and ministries as they seek to provide for the needs of their many clients. Your gifts bring joy and comfort to these recipients, most of whom are homeless, in transition, or living on the margins. The most requested item for every recipient organization was microfleece blankets which are washable, lightweight, compact, warm, attractive, and very affordable. With the cooler nights, these blankets have become valuable treasures.

Curbside pick-up on December 19, White Gifts Sunday, took place seamlessly ~ all within a half hour. The agencies greatly appreciated not only the gifts, but also the ease of picking up, transporting, and distributing these unwrapped gifts. Ronny Lynn and I greeted the agency representatives and assisted them in loading gifts if help was needed. Everyone indicated their appreciation, gratitude, and delight at the quantity, quality, and suitability of their gifts. It was interesting to note that each agency's needs and requests change from year to year.

Thank you, dear Central Union folks, for your generosity and flexibility. May God bless you abundantly as you bless others.

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## Join the Council

**I**n accordance with our Bylaws, the Nominations and Governance Committee is in the process of considering candidates to serve as Officers and At Large Members of the Church Council. If you are interested in being considered for a position on the Church Council, please submit your name and contact information via email to [council@centralunionchurch.org](mailto:council@centralunionchurch.org), Attention: Nomination and Governance Committee. Thank you.

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## Remembering Our Saints

**W**e lost four beloved members of Central Union Church in January. Please hold the families of all those listed below in your prayers.

**Helen Paris**, died on Thursday, January 13, 2022. A service is will be held on March 19 at 11 am.

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**Ann Simpson**, died on Wednesday, January 12, 2022.

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**Lucille "Taps" Pratt**, died on Tuesday, January 18, 2022. A memorial service will be held in the future.

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**Elsie Tuttle**, died on Wednesday, January 19, 2022.



LOVE NEVER FAILETH