

The Spire



Central Union Church and Preschool

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

August 2022

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Pastor's Page

Rev. Brandon Durán, *Acting Senior Minister*

When I first met the United Church of Christ, I was intrigued by the extravagant welcome. Every church I had known had language welcoming

visitors. Yet it seemed to me that the church welcome often only went so far. I would be welcome as long as I affirmed their beliefs. I would be welcome as long as I looked and spoke like I belonged. I would be welcome as I participated in their programs and followed their plans. The more I could conform, the more welcome I would feel. I wondered if there was a substantive difference with the UCC's language of "extravagant welcome."

In August, we will be exploring the values and distinctive attributes of our denomination. The Rev. Jonathan Roach, the Associate Conference Minister on the Big Island, got us started in late July with his sermon on the extravagant welcome of the UCC. In his sermon (which you can find on our [website](#)), Rev. Roach named that our extravagant welcome begins with, and remains rooted in, the nature of God.

Jesus, the embodiment of love divine, revealed this radical hospitality. He embraced the societal outcasts, shared the table with those who openly opposed him, and declared repeatedly that in God there is room for all. The hungry and the houseless, the sick and the grieving, the poor and the imprisoned, all have a place in the heart of God. Jesus wove faith and hospitality together proclaiming, "Very truly I tell you, whoever receives anyone I send accepts me; and whoever accepts me accepts the one who sent me" (John 13:20).

Yet what makes the welcome of our faith extravagant is not only the breadth of the embrace but also the depth. The power of our welcome is measured by our willingness to be changed by those who enter in. It takes courage

to enter a new space. It takes strength to share one's story and one's mana'o with a new community. How will we receive the ideas and the questions of those who come? I have heard it said that the literal translation of *e komo mai* is "to come inside" or "to enter." I believe that when we welcome others we are doing more than inviting them into a physical space, we are inviting them into the space of ideas and emotions; the space of communal dreams and plans. Will we as a church have the humility and courage to make space for the gifts we don't yet understand and the graces we didn't know we needed? To be a church of extravagant welcome is to be a church that is willing to grow, evolve, and change.

Living into an extravagant welcome calls for a particular perspective. It means listening for the voice of the Holy Spirit speaking through each person. It requires us to remember that everyone is a complex blend of stories, wounds, and hopes. It calls on us to see our inherent connectedness with all of creation. Last year, Valarie Kaur, one of the keynote speakers at the national gathering of the UCC, spoke about a revolutionary love that changes the way we approach others. She said that revolutionary love calls us to look at others with the belief, "You are a part of me I do not yet know."

Church, as we continue to welcome the community back to Central Union, let us reacquaint ourselves with this core tenant of our denomination. Let us praise God and bless others by embodying Christ's extravagant welcome.



Council Talking Points

Carl Schlack, *Council Chair*

“Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God’s grace in its various forms.” — 1 Peter 4:10

We are a Church of action. Many congregation members are actively engaged in furthering the work of Central Union’s many committees and ministries. Sometimes these members are serving in plain sight (e.g., helping to provide food at Serving Aloha, working in the Thrift Shop, and assisting with worship and memorial services) and sometimes they are serving out of sight (e.g., working in offices to preserve the history of Central Union Church, and meeting in conference rooms to plan for our future). Either way, their willingness to serve is a blessing not only to our Church but also to our larger community.



Still, there is much more work to be done and I encourage all members to consider volunteering to the extent they are able. Many of our existing committees, ministries and community outreach efforts need fresh hands and minds, and volunteers are also needed to assist with upcoming communication projects, ongoing technical (audio/visual) work, and grant writing, to name a few. Besides the good you do for our Church by volunteering, it also has many personal benefits – it is fun; you get to know your fellow Church members better; it strengthens our Church community; and studies have shown it improves health and longevity, provides a sense of purpose, counteracts stress and anxiety, and increases happiness! If you are interested in volunteering and contributing to the work of our Church, please contact me at council-chair@centralunionchurch.org and every effort will be made to find a project that suits your interest.

News from the Council Meeting held on July 28, 2022:

At our monthly meeting for July, the Council received reports and updates on the good work being done by various members, committees, and ministries. Allow me to highlight the following:

Central Union Preschool (“CUPS”) ended a successful summer school program on July 29, 2022 and will soon begin gearing up for the start of the new school year later this month on August 29, 2022. Special kudos to CUPS Director, Veronique Braithwaite, who alerted the Church to an opportunity to apply for money through the federal government’s Employee Retention Credit program, and also to Pastor Brandon, the Accounting Department and Church Treasurer, David Yee, who all worked together to submit the necessary documentation. Central Union Church learned recently that it qualifies for a large Employee Retention Credit and can expect to start receiving a refund (paid in installments) in a few months. Many thanks to all those involved!

Personnel and Pastoral Relations Committee: Nathan Wong, chairperson of the Personnel and Pastoral Relations Committee (“PPRC”), reported that candidate resumes are being reviewed and interviews are being conducted by PPRC in an ongoing effort to fill the vacant Comptroller position and the Executive Operations Officer position.

Diaconate chairperson, Martha Balkin, reported that in addition to the ongoing work done by the Diaconate during worship and memorial services, members of the Diaconate recently received training to allow them to assist Pastor Brandon and Pastor Mary with some of the most vital aspects of our faith such as the

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sacraments of Baptism and Communion. More training is planned to equip the Diaconate to assist with other important needs of Church members such as visitation. The women and men who serve on the Diaconate are the lifeblood of Central Union Church!

The Central Union Windward Ministry continues to be very active. In addition to regular worship services that include new worship musician, Dr. Sunyong Hwang, the Windward Ministry operates a thrift shop and a food bank and has made space to share the Windward campus and sanctuary with the Honolulu Marshallese United Church of Christ. Importantly, the Windward Ministry recently welcomed back the first recovery group to reconvene its meeting at the Windward campus.

Given the importance of the work being done by the **Senior Minister Search Committee** ("SMSC"), a substantial portion of our Council meeting was devoted to discussing matters presented by two members of the SMSC, who are also Council members (Greg Sato and Don Clifford). Greg and Don updated the Council on the SMSC's work to finalize the Church profile, the senior minister job description, and other materials that need to be in place prior to advertising for a settled senior minister.

Because of the diligent efforts of its hard-working members, the SMSC anticipates being able to commence advertising in the near future, to be followed by a review and evaluation of candidate applications and then interviews with the most promising candidates. To date, the SMSC remains on schedule to complete the candidate screening process and recommend a candidate for Council and congregation consideration by the end of calendar year 2022.

Treasurer's Report: Church Treasurer, David Yee, has been working with the Accounting Department to update the Church's financials. Updates have been completed through April 2022 and David provided the Council with a report on the Church's financials for March and April 2022. By next month's Council meeting, David anticipates the Accounting Department will have completed updates to the Church's financials through June 2022.

Should you have any questions or comments for the Council, please email them to us at council@centralunionchurch.org.

Mahalo,
Carl Schlack



Transitions in the Archives

From Rosemary Eberhardt to Karl Hedberg, our church's history is in good hands! Rosemary, a retired librarian and member of Central Union Church, has worked in the Central Union Church archives for over 30 years, starting as a volunteer and eventually serving as the Archivist/Historian. Karl's enthusiasm upon helping in the archives led Rosemary to invite him to take over the role of CUC Historian. Rosemary will continue to give historical church tours and train willing people to become docents. (Contact the church if you're interested!) We thank both Rosemary and Karl for their dedication to preserving the records of our church!

CUC Hosts E-Waste Collection

Carolynn Bell-Tuttle, *Green Team*

"Unless someone like you cares a whole awful lot, Nothing is going to get better. It's not."
—Dr. Seuss, *"The Lorax"*

On July 9th, Central Union Church (CUC) hosted its tenth annual E-Waste collection event. This year, we once again partnered with the Lions Club and the Growing Green Community Recycling Clean-Up Program. Even volunteers from Target Kailua store and local State Representative Della Au Belatti (who represents the area in which CUC is located) along with State Representative Scott Nishimoto (who represents the area just makai of CUC) came to help.



Together this group of volunteers unloaded cars of old computers, cell phones, iPads, televisions, and other electronic items to safely and securely recycle these electronic products. The collected e-waste will be shipped to California and usable parts will be recycled and repurposed into new products. Keeping old e-waste out of our landfills keeps them out of our water sources which is important to keeping our aquifer safe to drink, now and into the future. Mahalo to all who recycled their e-waste!





Seminary Reflections Rebecca Woodland

In the fall of 2016, at an age when all my peers had retired, I embarked on my seminary journey at Vancouver School of

Theology (VST). I had no idea what to expect. I had no career goal in mind. All I knew for certain was that God wanted me at VST—not just any seminary or program, but VST’s Indigenous Studies Program working towards a Master of Divinity degree.

All my life I have asked questions, many for which no satisfactory answers were provided. In some cases, questions were not even allowed, or at least not without repercussions. Although raised in a Christian home, exposed to Bible teaching literally every day of my life since birth, some things did not make sense to me. I wanted ~ needed ~ real answers. Not pat answers.

At VST, questions were not only encouraged and welcomed, they were required! VST’s inclusive, non-judgmental, thoughtful, open-hearted, relational approach to learning was a breath of fresh air. Most professors make a point of emphasizing that we are all co-learners, together. We all learn from each other.

The academic aspect of this school is far more strenuous than any Bible College or most graduate programs in the United States. The Canadian university system is more demanding, much like a European system. I have never worked so hard in my entire life. The “approved/not approved” grading system (NOT a pass-fail system) requires that all assignments must demonstrate the student’s competence ~ mastery, actually ~ of the subject matter. Anything less requires a re-write, or several re-writes, until the professor

considers that the student has mastered the material.

The professors come from various religious backgrounds and Christian denominations. Many of the professors are Indigenous, from numerous tribes throughout Canada and the U.S. All instructors have advanced degrees from prestigious universities. Studying theology and looking at Christianity through an Indigenous lens opened my eyes and my heart to a new way of understanding God, faith, justice, mercy, and suffering. I had many “Aha!” moments in almost every class. Finally, my faith made sense. Much of what I had previously been taught was “Christian” was simply the Euro-American White way of looking at the world. Culture had collided with Christianity and suppressed truth. VST changed my heart and my head.

**“Finally,
my faith
made sense.”**

Aside from the brilliant teaching, VST’s diverse faculty and student body makes for an exceptionally rich and unique learning experience for every student and instructor. The relationships developed throughout the past 5+ years will be treasured for the rest of my life, even though many of these relationships developed online via Zoom.

Located on the campus of the University of British Columbia, Vancouver School of Theology is surrounded by forest and ocean, on the ancestral and unceded land of the Musqueam people. Before the pandemic, we spent three summers on this beautiful campus for summer school. The highlight of summer school was getting to know our Indigenous sisters and brothers from all over Canada, the U.S. and beyond. We enjoyed salmon barbecues and meals together, and chapel services led by students from various denominations and tribal groups.

A key realization during my VST experience has been the trustworthiness of God in every situation ~ financial issues, health challenges
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(vision, hearing), academic struggles, the sudden death of my mother ~ no matter what the situation, God has been (and always is) present, upholding me and guiding me through it all. These are not mere words or platitudes. God's abiding presence and care is a palpable reality.

I am grateful to the Diaconate of Central Union Church for their generosity, paying my tuition and reimbursing the cost of many of my textbooks. This made it possible for me to continue my coursework without interruption.

I am grateful to my sisters Clara D. Priestler and Kauanoe Hoomanawanui for accompanying me on this VST journey. We are the first three women from Hawai'i to graduate from Vancouver School of Theology, graduating with Master of Divinity degrees. We finished well; each of us received special awards.

This is not the end ~ it is a launching pad! I am on a long, winding path toward ordination in the United Church of Christ and have been preaching often at Central Union Church Windward. (Come visit some Sunday. Service is at 10:00 a.m.)

Only God knows what lies ahead. And that is all I need to know.



Saturday, July 9th

“Youngish” adults from CUC and sister churches enjoyed a summer afternoon at the beach! It was a much appreciated opportunity for relaxation and fellowship. Check out their Spire-inspired sand creations!

Tuesday, July 12th

Youth helped to mālama ‘āina with Ho‘ōla Hou iā Kalauao, an organization that works to restore ‘āina and kānaka, as part of the 18th annual Ho‘olohe Pono, an immersion into the Native Hawaiian community to listen, learn, and serve.



Sunday, July 31st

We celebrated **Christmas in July** and were treated to shave ice between the worship services. As we enjoyed the gift of water, Community Ministry also collected donations to give the gift of water! Donations will be used to purchase water for families affected by the Red Hill water contamination on O‘ahu.

Community Ministry Feeding the Hungry

Ronny Lynn, *Community Ministry*

We would like to continue partnering with the many other churches and non-profits who are also providing meals for sheltered individuals who are abiding by the guidelines and making an effort to get their lives back. Our part is to bring them one comforting, healthy, hot meal with fruit and dessert, once a month.

On the second Tuesday of each month (2:30 to 5:30 p.m.), we will need a team of five people to prep and cook. On the Monday before, we need one individual to shop for groceries and store them in our CUC kitchen. We need four assistants to unload the large pans from the van at Keauhou Shelter and stay to fill the sectioned cafeteria trays for take-out. There is no dining room 6:00-7:30 p.m. At Family Promise we just leave the large trays (due to COVID restrictions).



We hope you will feel called to give back in this way. Individuals and families are welcome. Contact Pastor Mary Herbig (mary-herbig@centralunionchurch.org) for more information.



2022 CUC Women's Retreat at Camp Mokule'ia *"Sabbath Sisters: a time to Rest and Recharge"*

Dates: Friday, November 4 (4 p.m.) – Sunday, November 6 (12 p.m.)

Costs: Lodge (\$75) / Cabin (\$40) / Saturday only (\$20)

Capacity and Safety: 32 maximum in the lodge; 20 maximum in cabins.

Registration is open online: centralunionchurch.org/womens-retreat

~ Remembering our Saints ~

Please hold the family of **Anna Goo**, who died on July 2, 2022, in your prayers. Private services are scheduled for September.

Please remember **Louise Knowlton**, who died on July 23, 2022. Let's hold up her family in prayer during this time of mourning. Private services are being held at Punchbowl in September.