

A photograph of a church interior at night. In the foreground, a single white candle is lit, with a bright yellow and blue flame. The background is out of focus, showing the arched architecture of a church sanctuary, including pews and a distant altar area. Warm, golden light from the candle and other sources in the background creates a soft, atmospheric glow. The title 'The Spire' is written in a white, elegant script font across the upper portion of the image.

The Spire

Central Union Church and Preschool

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

January 2023

Vol. 93 - No. 1



Following the Christmas Star

Rev. Mary Herbig, Minister of Congregational Life & Care

Hau'oli Makahiki Hou!

I pray that your Christmas was joyful and that this new year will be full of love, wisdom, and grace.

New Year's isn't the only holiday we've celebrated this month. On January 6, we celebrated the Christian holiday of Epiphany! Epiphany is one of the oldest festival days in the Christian faith – dating all the way back to the 4th century. The Greek word *epiphaneia* means “manifestation” or “appearance.” On Epiphany Sunday, we commemorate the first manifestation of God in Jesus Christ to the Gentiles, who are represented by the Magi, the wise ones. The Magi were mysterious figures who had traveled from the East following a star. We don't know much about these Magi, but it's safe to say that they were not Jewish. Instead, they represented the nations and religions of the world. Their arrival is critical to the Christmas story because it is the first reminder to us that God's incarnation is not just for the holy few, but for *all*. All are welcome to come and worship at the foot of the manger.

The Magi have always been my favorite characters at the manger since I was a child. In our family crèche, they always looked so interesting, so mysterious. With their colorful robes, their strange gifts, and (of course) their camels, I wanted to be like them. They made me think of adventure and exploration.

Even as I have grown up, my fascination with the Magi remains. My reason, though, has shifted.

Today, I am amazed at the Magi's ability to live an “eyes-up” lifestyle – one where they were watching and waiting for God to appear. Even more than that, I am inspired by their eagerness to follow – or rather, their eagerness to be led. Because of their discernment and trust, they allowed themselves to be led by God's star into the unknown. They didn't know where they'd end up. They didn't know if they would be safe. All they knew is that they were being led by God – and they needed to follow. Because of their

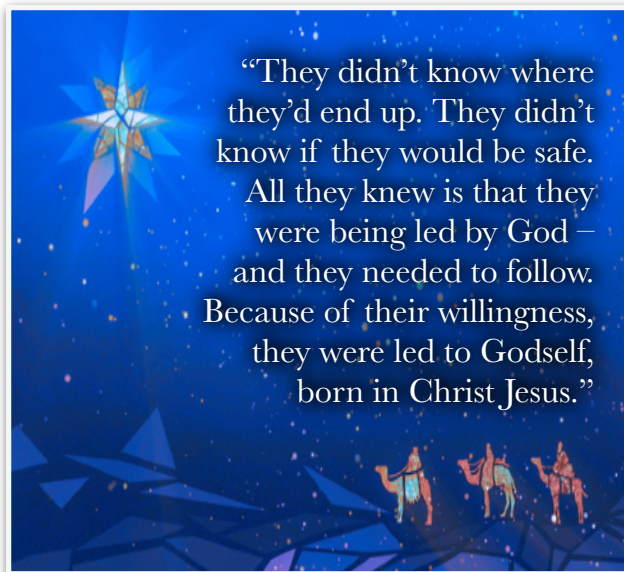
willingness, they were led to Godself, born in Christ Jesus. Because of their earnest following, they got to worship at the feet of the Divine.

Beloved of God, as we enter into this new year, there will be many people and things that will want to lead us – that will want us to follow them. Many “stars” will be vying for our attention – stars of power and prestige, of wealth, of discontentment, or of the “easy road.” Our eyes will be drawn to them because

they are the stars that the world tells us are worth following. Yet, as the people of God, we are called to a different guide. We are called to follow the Christmas star – the star that leads us to the feet of Jesus.

Discerning which star is God's star isn't always easy, though. It requires us, like the Magi, to live with our eyes up, watchfully and prayerfully. And perhaps most of all, it requires us to discern together in community, just as the Magi did. In order to make our way to the manger, we need one another – our varied insights, experiences, and gifts. We need one another's vision, words, and prayers.

Church, let us enter into this new year as a prayerful community, as one 'ohana on a journey to seek the face of God!



“They didn't know where they'd end up. They didn't know if they would be safe. All they knew is that they were being led by God – and they needed to follow. Because of their willingness, they were led to Godself, born in Christ Jesus.”

Message from our Church Council Chair



“Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland.” (*Isaiah 43:18-19*) “For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.” (*Jeremiah 29:11*)

As the season of Advent ends and a new calendar year begins, we are filled with hope. Hope because Advent was our reminder that Jesus – the Light of the World – dwells among us, and hope because the new year renews our belief that we can improve, that change is possible.

I witnessed how the Spirit works to change us when picking up my Christmas tree in early December at Central Union Church. The line was long at the Ewa/Makai corner of our Honolulu campus where Habilitat had set up their trailers full of Christmas trees. People, young and old, were patiently waiting, sometimes speaking with their neighbors in line, sometimes catching sight of a friend or relative and stopping to talk story for a minute or two, and sometimes catching the scent of pine trees when the wind shifted. An elderly lady joined the line three people behind me. I heard her say she was sorry she forgot her walking stick as she held on to one of the white wooden parking barriers on our Great Lawn. The two unrelated men behind me offered to keep her place in line if she wanted to wait somewhere more comfortable, but she insisted on staying as close to her place in line as she had wooden barriers to hold on to. As we neared the front of the line, there were no more wooden barriers so the men behind me and I conferred and agreed to have her move ahead of us. While she waited for the next available Habilitat member to help her find a tree, she held onto my hand to steady herself and she told me she wanted to pick out a 4-foot Christmas tree – a “small one” she said, that she could “put on a table by the window and decorate with ornaments” that held memories for her. She was your grandmother, your mother, your auntie, your friend – she was your neighbor.

It was also heartwarming to see the people from Habilitat on our campus since it is an organization

that works to transform lives. They were working hard, first in the warm late-morning sun and then 30 minutes later in the rain as the Manoa mist descended and turned into a cooling drizzle, but they never lost their smiles and their positive spirit as they helped people pick out just the right Christmas tree, then tightly bundle it and carry it to the car or truck that would transport it home. Partnering with Habilitat each Christmas is another way Central Union makes a difference in our community and it is in keeping

with the message of our Christian faith, which is one of redemption and transformation, not for a day but for a lifetime. Like the redeemed protagonist, Ebenezer Scrooge, from Charles Dickens’ *A Christmas Carol*, said at the end of the book, “I will honor Christmas in my heart, and try to keep it all the year.” There is joy in transformation; the sense of

starting over, of being or beginning something new, revitalizes us and gives us the strength and perspective to live and view life differently.

So, Central Union Church, how will we meet the real-life challenges of 2023 and beyond? How must we change to ensure that Central Union Church will always be that beacon that reflects God’s light and love in an ever-changing world, and always welcomes all people to walk with us on their faith journeys and to join with us in serving others? Our upcoming annual **Budget Meeting on January 29, 2023**, will include, in addition to a discussion and vote on the proposed Budget, a very important presentation by our Vision Team on the future of Central Union Church. Please make every effort to attend this important meeting.

Should you have any questions or comments for me, please email me at council@centralunionchurch.org, and I will reply as soon as I can.

—**Carl Schlack**, *Council Chair*



Welcome, Pastor Dave!



Pastor Dave will serve as Associate Minister for the next few months during this transition period. His first Sunday with us was January 8.

The Rev. Dr. David Smazik grew up in the Chicago, IL area. Shortly after his birth, his parents joined a church community which became central to his upbringing. On most Sundays, his parents' new spiritual fervor, which was not always shared by their sons, made them some of the first ones to arrive at church and the last to leave. Post-high school education brought him to Hope College (Holland, MI) where he met his wife, Ann, and to the University of Dubuque, a Presbyterian Church USA seminary in Iowa. In the years to follow, he also earned a Master's in Counseling Psychology, and a Doctorate of Ministry focused on congregational revitalization.

The Smazik's children, Matthew and his family and Jennie and her husband, live in the Midwest. Beyond Dave and Ann's love of being with family, their interests include walking/hiking, exploring new areas, reading, sports, and home DIY projects, of which many valiant attempts have produced some acceptable results.

I look forward to working alongside Pastor Mary and the congregation in this time of transition. I am grateful to be part of Central Union's journey as each of us seeks to Engage and Embrace ALL as we seek to Embody Christ!

Ann and I would like to thank the Central Union congregation and staff for the warm welcome we received. The end of a calendar year was a very busy time for individuals and families to make provisions for our arrival. We appreciate all that was done and for the opportunity over the next few months to participate in ministry alongside you. Mahalo!

—Pastor Dave

Dave began ordained ministry as the full-time Executive Director of a Christian camp and concurrently served in three part-time interim pastorates. He began full-time parish ministry as a solo pastor in rural Illinois. He then served the Westminster Presbyterian Church in Rockford, IL for 17 years, the congregation in which Pastor Mary Herbig and her family were faithful and exemplary participants. Dave more recently completed ten years of ministry with the historic Presbyterian Church in Morristown, NJ, followed by a two-year interim position in Indianapolis, IN, which brought him back to his roots in the Midwest.



Dave and Ann are greeted at the airport by Carl Schlack and Martha Balkin.

Senior Minister Search Committee Update

Don Clifford, *Senior Minister Search Committee Chair*

We Have Finished the Season of

Preparation – During 2022, our Committee diligently worked to complete its preparation to search for a new Senior Minister for our beloved church.

We organized the Committee into designated Teams assigned to Congregational Outreach, Church Enterprises, Church Profile, Position Description, Compensation & Benefits, UCC Hawai'i Conference Liaison, Candidate Screening & Ranking, and numerous other preparatory tasks, research, and assignments.

We re-immersed ourselves in our church's rich history and legacy to understand the underpinnings of Central Union Church's work in our community for almost two centuries. We also invited more than four dozen members of the church's congregation to serve as Ambassadors. These gracious volunteers either had deep institutional knowledge of our church, unique skills or gifts to contribute, had learned advice to share from past searches, or they simply wanted to donate their time to help the Committee with many of the tasks necessary to be fully prepared.

We embarked on the production of the documentary movie [*Love Never Fails*](#). Our goal was to be able to explain transparently, and authentically, who we are as a congregation, and as a church, to the Senior Minister candidates.

In the process, we coordinated with the church's Council, committees, and ministries to understand their aspirations – as well as their views on our church's current and future challenges. We conducted a Congregational Survey to understand the congregation's priorities and preferences for a Senior Minister. We responded to emails and letters from the congregation that were offered to help guide the process.

We invited several guest speakers that could share their mana'o with the Committee on numerous topics of importance to our Committee's education and discernment. Lastly, there was much discussion for more than a year regarding the spiritual and organizational leadership qualities that would ultimately be needed in our next Senior Minister.

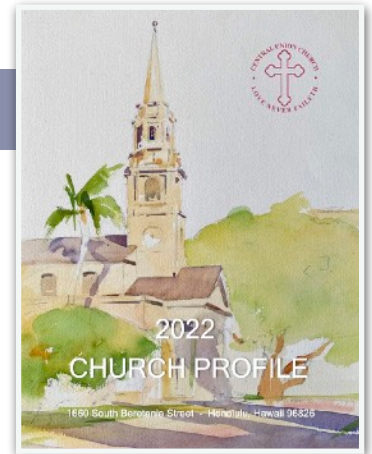
We Are Now in a Season of Waiting – We are patiently waiting for the new settled Senior Minister that God has already chosen, to work with us into the next season of serving others.

Starting in the Fall of 2022, we began advertising for the Senior Minister position. We decided to use five different channels of advertising in order to cast the broadest net. To date, we have received more than 50 letters of interest and 15 completed applications requesting consideration.

With the good counsel of Pastor Brandon and Pastor Mary last Fall, we learned that this next phase of the process should not be rushed. And, as a congregation, we needed to expect months to lapse between the time when the candidates first express their interest in our church – through the time it'll take for the candidates to discern for themselves where God is calling them in ministry – and until the time when we call our next Senior Minister.

As we begin the screening and discernment process on January 14, 2023, to review the initial 15 applications that we've received thus far, we humbly ask that you include the Committee's work in your daily prayers.

With Your Prayers & In HIS Perfect Timing...



View the documentary and Church Profile online:
centralunionchurch.org/smsc-update-jan-2023/

Hallelujah!

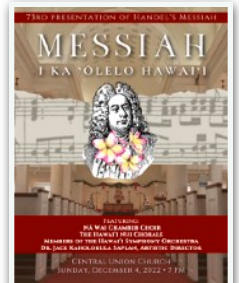
Margaret Lloyd, *Director of Music Ministries*

After a two-season hiatus, Central Union Church shared the 73rd presentation of Handel's *Messiah* on Sunday evening, December 4, under the direction of Dr. Jace Kaholokula Saplan, *Artistic Director*. This time-honored tradition has been a gift of music to our community.



The 2022 concert, *Messiah i ka 'Ōlelo Hawai'i*, was the premiere of a critical edition of the Christmas portion of the oratorio sung in Hawaiian. Featured in the performance were Nā Wai Chamber Choir, The Hawai'i Nui Chorale, Soloists: Emily Vidler, *soprano*; Blythe Kelsey, *mezzo soprano*; Keith Wallace, *tenor*; and Christopher Kelsey, *bass*; and members of the Hawai'i Symphony Orchestra. The concluding "Hallelujah!" chorus featured Lauren Kanoelani Chang Williams, *Kumu Hula*.

Preparations for this performance included Hawaiian translation by Dr. Saplan; text setting by Thomas Goedecke, *Choral Scholar*; and chorus rehearsal assistance by Rebecca Chock, *Director of Choirs*, and Blythe Kelsey. A project such as this requires "a village" and the Music Ministries department also thanks additional church staff, Choral Scholars, Music Committee, Diaconate, Pohnpei Ministry and all who supported this endeavor in so many ways. Mahalo nui loa!



White Gifts

Rebecca Woodland, *White Gifts Coordinator*

This year's White Gifts project wrapped up quickly and efficiently on Sunday, December 18, after the heart-touching Christmas pageant. Representatives from our partner social-service agencies began arriving at 12:15 for curbside gift pickup, and by 1:05 all gifts had been picked up and were on their way to be distributed. Every representative expressed gratitude and joy, and some even shared that we were an answer to their prayers. They also mentioned how much easier it is now that the gifts are not wrapped. They received the items they needed.



In total, we provided gifts to seven agencies which currently serve 783 clients. These are some of the most vulnerable people in our community. Most are houseless or in shelters; some are in transition and others are very elderly and shut-in. Mahalo for helping to spread Christmas joy to these people! Thanks to your generosity, we were able to provide them with 1,100 much-needed gifts. Favorite gifts included fleece blankets (the small kind in a roll) and McDonalds gift cards.

If you didn't get to make a monetary donation, it's not too late! Simply send a check to Central Union Church and write "White Gifts" on the memo line OR donate online. The funds will be used to reimburse shoppers.



Harpists in worship 12/4



~ Advent ~
Windward
campus



Let it foam!
Preschool
"snow" day
12/9



Mahalo!
Volunteers preparing a mailing



Volunteers stuffing Christmas bulletins



Christmas Eve Family Service participants



"The Longest Night" 12/21
Blue Christmas Service



Christmas online worship

But tonight, I invite you to close your eyes and listen
with fresh ears. Take a deep breath...



Choir singing on Christmas Eve



Christmas Eve
Family Service



Christmas Eve Candlelight Service

Youth Ministry Update

Melissa Thach, *Youth Director*

Aloha and thank you for the warm welcome to Central Union Church! If we haven't had a chance to meet yet, my name is Melissa Thach and I'm the new Youth Director at CUC. We kicked off December celebrating the Sundays of Advent and getting to know one another, had a dinner before the Blue Christmas service, and many of the youth were involved in the Christmas Eve services. On Wednesday 12/28, the youth volunteered at Serving Aloha and on Friday 12/30 we had our +5 Christmas Party.

I look forward to many opportunities of connecting with the youth – and you all! This month we have a movie outing and the first weekend of February is our Punahou Parking fundraiser! If you are interested or willing to volunteer with the youth we would LOVE to have you. We are also planning a Hawai'i-based retreat and mission this summer—watch for details on that! Thank you again for all the aloha. I look forward to engaging and embracing our community together!



Save Your Stamps!

Carol Miura, *Woman's Board of Missions for the Pacific Islands*

The Woman's Board Stamp Project continues! New or used U.S. and foreign stamps are used by the workers in the Bethel-St. Elizabeth program. Every undamaged stamp, postcard, or stamped envelope has potential value to the individuals in this program. Any contributions may be marked "**Attention: Carol Miura**" and dropped off at the church office reception desk. Thank you!



Christmas Poinsettias

(Our apologies!) The following Poinsettia Donations didn't make it into the Christmas Flower insert:



Donna Ulbricht

In loving memory of **Don Ulbricht**

Daniel Shaver

In loving memory of **Richard & Marcella Nanod**
Edith Shaver
Anna Goo

50+ Year Members

Susan Johnson, *Senior Services Committee*

On **Sunday, January 22**, in all of the worship services, we will honor those who have been a member of our church for 50 years or more. There are 150 of these members both here in Hawai'i and beyond. Let's celebrate their love and faithfulness!

Remembering Our Saints

Please hold the family of **Carol Judd**, who died on December 1, 2022, in your prayers. Services will be held Saturday, January 21, 2023, at the Punahou Chapel in Honolulu. Visitation at 2 PM, service at 3 PM, reception to follow. In lieu of flowers, donations can be made to Punahou School.