

First Sunday of Advent,  
Yamashita 'Ohana  
lighting the candle of hope

# *The Spire*



Photo: Kristen Young

**Central Union Church and Preschool**  
"We Engage and Embrace ALL as we seek to Embody Christ!"

**December 2023**  
**Vol. 93 - No. 12**



## Pastor's Page: Seeking "a thrill of hope"

**Rev. Rushan Sinnaduray,**  
*Senior Minister*

As I write this, we are preparing to begin a new Christian Year on Sunday, December 3rd, the First

Sunday of Advent. Any year in any calendar has its rhythms and cycles, and for Christians who follow the liturgical year there is an ebb and flow in our worship, and in the themes presented to us from the great stories of faith.

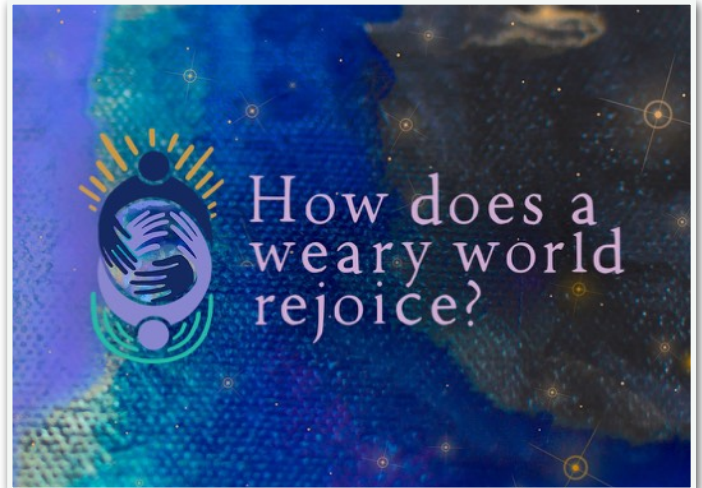
The liturgical calendar reminds us that living in God's time is an act of subversion. The seasons of the Christian year are a reminder that as Christians the values and assumptions that undergird our faith are the direct opposite of, for instance, consumerism and individualism. The values and assumptions expressed through the ebb and flow of seasons from Advent to Christmas, Epiphany to Lent and then Easter and Pentecost are centered on giving, shared journeys, shared dreams and vision, a shared commitment to the renewal of humankind as expressed in the vision of the prophet Isaiah.

In a time when so many people seem to be experiencing a spiritual malaise and a weariness, when so many people have a sense of loss of any central guiding purpose and

meaning for life, when the past and its lessons are forgotten and the future is merely some kind of materialist acquisitive paradise, the cycle of the church year helps Christians to refocus on

those deep and profound meaning-making stories from scripture that enable us to stand confident in darkness as well as in light, in trouble as well as in joy, whatever the season or the times.

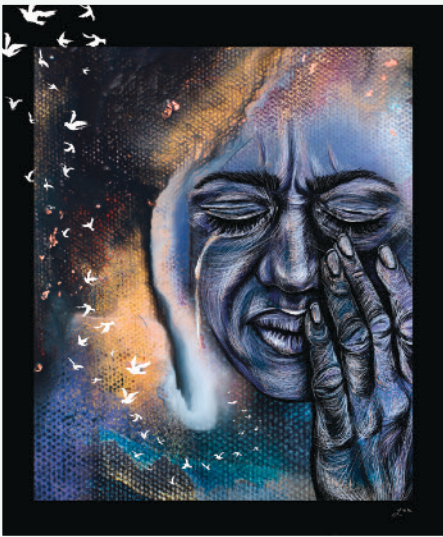
We have rhythms of Advent and Lent, of Christmas and Easter, of colors of blue, white and gold, green, purple again, white and gold again, of red and fruitful green... The whole story of the human interaction with the divine is told year in, year out, through the cycle of the Christian Year beginning on the first Sunday in Advent. The cycle begins again, giving chances to see it all again maybe for the first time, and to discover God in darkness as well as in light, in trouble as well as in joy, in all seasons and all times.



This Advent and Christmas our worship will focus on the question of "How Does a Weary World Rejoice?" Each week of Advent we will reflect on a different response to that question as we hold space for our weariness and our joy and as we seek a "thrill of hope" in our hurting and troubled world.

Please join us this Advent and Christmas, and invite a friend or neighbor who needs to hear a response to how they can rejoice in the midst of whatever weariness they may be feeling.

Blessings and peace,  
Pastor Rushan



"Make Your Face Shine" by Rev. Lisle Gwynn Garrity  
Sanctified Art | How does a weary world rejoice? Advent devotional



## Message from Our Church Council Chair

Aloha Central Union Church!

Sometimes, you just don't know what to say. Feelings and emotions are swirling inside you, but they resist definition and remain ineffable. You sense a

deep-seated weariness, like an unseen weight you have been carrying for years that drags you down and saps you of joy. But you keep pushing on because, well, things need to get done and other people are relying on you.

The many challenges we have faced at Central Union Church the last three and one-half years have affected us individually and cumulatively as a church. COVID closures and subsequent restrictions, the loss of clergy, the loss of staff, financial constraints, major decisions about our property and facilities, all of these and much more have kept us on edge and, at times, have left us frustrated, stressed, and worn out as we wondered how our story would unfold.

So, as we enter the season of Advent, it feels particularly apt that Pastor Rushan's new sermon series asks us "How does a weary world rejoice?" (Or, if I may rephrase it, "How does a weary Central Union Church congregation rejoice?") As Pastor Rushan has noted, we start by acknowledging our weariness. By naming it, we free ourselves to deal more honestly with the anticipation that is at the heart of Advent, and we allow our reflections on hope, peace, joy, and love to take on new meaning as we await the coming of Jesus, the long-awaited Messiah, who will relieve our weariness ("Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest." [Matthew 11:28]).

Although I would like to think that 2024 will be less challenging for Central Union than 2023, I don't know for sure. What I do know is that there will always be new challenges in the life of our church. And I also know that we must not forget the challenges we overcame in 2023 and the people who made it possible as that gives us the courage and confidence to address future challenges.

Just some of the important accomplishments that happened in 2023 include the following:

- The long-awaited arrival of our new Senior Minister, Pastor Rushan Sinnaduray.
- The filling of the Comptroller position.
- The recent hiring of a Chief Operations Officer.
- The conclusion of years of work by the Vision Team culminating in the Congregation authorizing the Church Council to enter into long-term ground leases and/or sell portions of our campuses as a means to address the long-term financial viability of Central Union.
- The ongoing work of the Real Estate Committee evaluating possible development opportunities for portions of our campuses to ensure the long-term financial viability of Central Union.
- The continuation of the Serving Aloha program that addresses the food insecurity of thousands of people in our community.

We are blessed with exceptional clergy and dedicated staff members, but we also are fortunate to have a remarkable group of church members who give freely and generously of their time and talent. None of the foregoing accomplishments, or countless other activities that occur on our campuses each week, would be possible without the involvement of dozens and dozens of church members who are rarely acknowledged or thanked. To those church members, I extend my heartfelt gratitude for all you do; please know that you are appreciated by me, by the Church Council, and by the many others whose lives you touch.

Should you have any questions or otherwise wish to contact me, you can reach me by email at [council-chair@centralunionchurch.org](mailto:council-chair@centralunionchurch.org). Thank you.

Mahalo,  
Carl Schlack  
*Council Chair*

# Meet Our New Chief Operations Officer

**Kristen Young**, *Communications Manager*



Please help us welcome Troy Tomita to the Central Union Church staff! Born and raised in Kāne'ohe, Troy is a graduate of Castle High School and the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa where he majored in Japanese and went on to live and teach in Japan for two years.

Troy comes to us with over 30 years of work experience at the YMCA where he started as a participant in his youth and finished as the Senior Executive Director overseeing three branches (Central, Atherton, Mililani). Like the YMCA, our church seeks to address the needs of the community. Central Union's work in the wider

community and its mission to "Engage and Embrace ALL" is what drew Troy to the job of Chief Operations Officer here at Central Union. In his role as COO, he will work in tandem with the Senior Minister overseeing administrative aspects and implementing strategies into daily operations to carry out the church's mission. This will allow Pastor Rushan to focus on pastoral ministry.

Troy has a wife, a daughter in high school, son in college, and an identical twin brother! He enjoys hiking, kayaking, biking, and is passionate about the outdoors and sharing it with others. One of his life goals is to visit as many national parks as possible.

Troy shares, "I'm excited to be here and to help the church move its mission and strengthen our presence in the community." Say hello to Troy ([troy-tomita@centralunionchurch.org](mailto:troy-tomita@centralunionchurch.org))!

## Sabbath Sisters Share Stories from the Women's Retreat

**Lauren Buck Medeiros & Lisa Buck Haley**, *Women's Retreat*

The 2023 CUC Women's Retreat (from November 3-5 at Camp Mokule'ia) did not disappoint! Sabbath Sisters did a lot of laughing, loving, learning, listening, and leaning into our journey closer to God, to each other, and to our own inner work of acceptance, resting, healing and empowerment! The beauty of creation, the song of the ocean and strength of the mountains contributed.

There were thirty-four women participating and we received an offering totaling \$1,157.10 for [Women Helping Women, Maui](#) to share our aloha further.

Excerpts of the "Call to Worship" by Ellie and Sarah Mudrick captures the essence of the weekend:

"Welcome, Sabbath Sisters, to worship at the end of another beautiful Women's Retreat. We've sung, swam, napped, ate, laughed, burned marshmallows, painted, walked on the beach, did yoga with bamboo, and then got massages to relax the resulting knots. We've reflected on the power of storytelling, discussed Mary, who presses pause to listen at the feet of Jesus; and Martha, who kept the house together so Mary could do so. We have made plans to nurture our Mary side while embracing our Martha side, making commitments for the mini-sabbaths to welcome into our daily lives. If there is a group of people that do NOT need a reminder about showing aloha to each other, it's this one, and we can all attest to the joy and love we've felt being part of this experience."





Excerpt of a poem written by “resident poet”  
and seasoned Women’s Retreat participant  
Marion Lyman-Mersereau:

We leave our mark in the sand  
yet the ever busy Martha-like tide -  
washes over any evidence of our presence

Maybe Martha would take time  
for a swim and walk and enjoy a talk  
with a new or old friend  
Mary might place white coral stones  
among needles and pinecones  
to create a path to our heart

We will keep seeking balance between  
work and wisdom - at least we will try  
as we hold memories  
of a time we gathered together  
between earth, sea, and sky



A Haiku by Marion:

Circles lead us ‘round  
while breaking waves share their sound  
slowly center’s found



## Children's Ministry Prepares for Advent

**Cayanna Herrera**, *Director of Children's Ministries*

Happy Advent! Advent is a very special time. On the liturgical calendar, it marks the start of the church year and is a beautiful season of preparing our hearts and homes for the Mystery of Christmas. In Godly Play, we have begun by exploring the story of The Holy Family and will move through the Advent season with a building story each Sunday of Advent that explores the people, events, and even creatures surrounding the birth of Jesus.

On November 26, we enjoyed a time of learning and fellowship in our Advent workshop. We learned about the origins and meaning of Advent and the Advent wreath. We also kicked off our Advent community service project and even decorated some Christmas cookies as practice for the upcoming baking season!

This Advent, we are encouraging families to create their own Advent wreath (it might be a circle... it might not be! Get creative!). If you missed the workshop and would like to participate, please contact me at: [cayanna-herrera@centralunoinchurch.org](mailto:cayanna-herrera@centralunoinchurch.org). Once you create your one-of-a-kind family Advent wreath, send us a picture!

The last part of our Advent preparations this year focused on our special Christmas Stocking. We are partnering with Central Union Preschool and Parents and Children Together (PACT) to help our friends on Maui who are beginning the process of recovering from the August wildfires. We are working together to Stuff the Stocking with specific items for keiki, teens, adults, and kūpuna. Items may be dropped off by December 17, White Gifts Sunday, when we will finish collecting our filled stockings then take them to PACT on December 18 to be shipped to Maui for distribution. Included here is the list of needed items for our friends on Maui:



### **Baby/Children/Teen**

- Diapers (newborn - size 6)
- Baby wipes
- New toys (newborn - age 5)
- Craft supplies
- Books
- Beach towels
- Hydroflasks (water bottles)
- Lip balm
- Soap (hypoallergenic/unscented)
- Baby shampoo

### **Adult/Senior**

- Slippers (all sizes)
- Socks
- Sunscreen
- Wash cloths
- Shaving cream
- Razors
- Soap
- Deodorants
- Toothpaste
- Toothbrushes
- Face wash



## Fall Fun for CUPS

**Shelly Taira**, *Assistant Director, Central Union Preschool*

The holiday season has arrived and so much is happening here at CUPS! In November, the Green Cottage class hosted our Thanksgiving Chapel. They sang a song and shared their message of thankfulness. We also had our annual Parent Teacher Organization (PTO) FALL FITNESS FUNdraiser, “if you believe, you can achieve”. This is our one and only PTO fundraising opportunity for the school year. Our CUPS keiki were sponsored by family and friends for the event which encouraged fitness and promoted fun, while raising contributions to support the PTO school events that our students enjoy throughout the year. The students have also been enjoying field trips to farms and a lo‘i. We even had a visit from the Honolulu Police Department and Honolulu Fire Department.



# Our Wider Church

## On 'Daring' Faith Conversations

**K.R. Harding**, *Member In Discernment*

On November 4, 2023, the O'ahu Association of the Hawai'i Conference United Church of Christ held its fall gathering, the 'Aha Mokupuni, hosted by Makiki Christian Church and its pastor, Rev. Wayne Ibara. Several members of Central Union Church were among the 35-or-so attendees, including Rev. Kyle Lovett, Linn Garcia, Kristen Young, and myself. (Former CUC pastor Rev. Ted Robinson, currently an interim minister at Waiokeola Church in Kahala also graced us with his presence.)

The centerpiece of the 8:30 AM – 1 PM meeting was the idea of "Daring Faith Conversations", spurred by a thoughtful report from our Innovation and Engagement Missional Team presented by Rev. Heather Barfield, now the kahu at Kaumakapili Church in Kalihi. The core of Pastor Heather's dynamic talk, and subsequent small group discussions, was how can we "dare", or challenge, our faith to move beyond present barriers, to better engage our community, and to envision the "big picture" of our wider Church's future?

Delegates, ministers, and friends shared ideas and "onolicious" chicken salad (seemingly a prerequisite for such "talk story" events) and focused on notions of more accessible homeless shelters, community gardens, and "Learning Tree"-style educational programs — in short, sharpening our Conference's missional focus on environmental and justice issues. How can we "dare" each other into greater engagement and advocacy, as followers of Christ? Leading by listening throughout the session was our deeply committed Conference Minister, Rev. David Popham, who continues to set a high bar for our Church in Hawai'i.



So, to our parishioners here at Central Union, what about us: where does God most need us?; what is God doing that we can embrace?; and who is calling out in deafening silence for our kōkua?

## Work of the UCC Board

**Eleanore A. Chong**, *UCC Board of Directors*

Greg Sato and I attended the October 2023 meeting of the United Church of Christ Board of Directors. A few years ago the General Synod voted to consolidate the Boards of Directors (instead of the "proliferation" of too many boards, and too many instrumentalities) in order to streamline the work of the church. The work of the Board of Directors is laid out in the Bylaws of the United Church of Christ (paragraphs 221-232.) As the General Synod ad interim it provides coordination and evaluation of the work of the church. It is responsible for strategic planning, policymaking, coordinated communication, and fundraising.

The highlight of our time together was the installation of the Rev.

Karen Georgia Thompson as the General

Minister and President of the United Church of Christ. It was a truly ecumenical service with participants from many faith traditions. Like her predecessors, Karen Georgia will be the spiritual leader of the United Church of Christ; the Theological Interpreter; and Chief Executive Officer.



## Talking with UCC GMP

We had two opportunities to hear from the Rev. Dr. Karen Georgia Thompson at Central Union Church in November during her stopover in Honolulu. We give thanks for her time of sharing and pray for her ministry!



## Remembering Our Saints

Please pray for the family of **Maricon Walker**, who died on November 11, 2023. Services were held on Saturday, December 2, in the Parish Hall.

