

THE SPIRE

Simple and stark to start the season of Lent, this **Lenten Altarscape** has been gradually growing in color and dimension. As the season progresses, you can see the floral evolution each week with the coming of spring. The Flower Committee will continue adding to it up until the final celebration on Easter. Keep your eyes on the Sanctuary communion table!

Central Union Church and Preschool

March 2026

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

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Reclaiming the Heart of Church Vitality

Rev. Rushan Sinnaduray
Senior Minister

Dear Central Union 'Ohana,

I often hear the refrain that the church is dying—not just ours, but the Christian Church everywhere. The predictions, the statistics, the anxieties about budgets and attendance can make decline feel inevitable. But when I look around, that's not what I see. I see people hungry for meaning, longing for community, seeking justice, and searching for hope. These are not signs of death. They are signs of a world aching for spiritual renewal—and of a church being invited into transformation.

Before we can talk about growth, we need to remember what the church actually **is**. A church is not primarily a building, a sanctuary, or a campus. A church is not even a program or a budget. **The church is the people.** The gathered, Spirit-led community of believers seeking God, following Christ, and serving the world. Wherever people join together in worship, in relationship, in compassion, and in justice, the church becomes fully alive. The life of the church is the life of its people.

If the church is the people, then **ministry** is the work those people do. Ministry is not a particular program or committee. Ministry is the everyday service offered by the people of God, by every member of the church.

The ministry of a church is the ministry of its people. When the people serve, the church shines. When the people engage, the church grows. When the people live out their faith, the church becomes a force of transformation.

This is why Jesus compared the kingdom to a mustard seed—small, ordinary, easily overlooked, yet growing into something expansive enough to shelter life. The vitality of the church has never depended on size or spectacle. It grows when ordinary people live their faith with courage and love.

Churches don't die because of numbers alone. They decline when fear grows louder than faith, when institutional maintenance replaces spiritual mission. Our calling is not to chase metrics but to reclaim our core purpose: worship that grounds us, formation

that deepens us, hospitality that opens us, and service that sends us.

We live in a world that craves instant results. But the spiritual life moves at the pace of God's Spirit, not the pace of the marketplace. I like to think of the church as a sailboat. You cannot crank the wheel and expect an immediate pivot. Change happens gradually. You steer gently, intentionally, trusting the wind to do what only the wind can do. The sailor's task is attentiveness - feeling the breeze shift, sensing the pull of the current, responding patiently.

The church is no different. We cannot force growth. We cannot manufacture vitality. We cannot rush the Spirit. But we *can* turn - slowly, steadily - toward our purpose. We can set our sails toward worship, formation, hospitality, and service. And then we trust the Spirit to move us.

Jesus calls us to be salt and light—to bring flavor, healing, courage, and illumination to the world. A vital, vibrant church is one whose presence makes a difference: a place where neighbors and the community find welcome, where worship, music and conversation spark hope, where justice and compassion take root, where God's love becomes visible.

When we live this way—when we become salt for the weary and light for the searching—the church grows not because of marketing, but because ministry is happening. The building becomes a tool, not a trophy. All of us, the people of God, become ministers of grace.

You will hear me talk more about faith than finances, purpose more than programs, depth more than data. Healthy numbers follow a healthy church—not the other way around. The myth of a dying church only becomes true if we stop trusting in the living God. But when we reclaim our purpose, when we plant mustard seeds of faith, when we shine with Christ's light, when we trust the Spirit's slow, steady wind, the church becomes vibrant again. Alive with possibility. Rooted in hope. Ready for wherever God is steering us next.

With gratitude for the ministry we share,

Pastor Rushan



March 1 – Bishop William Barber & Rev. Dr. Della Owens Barber shared a joint sermon titled, “In Need of A Return to Love and Life” based on Mark 15:39.



February 22 – Scout Sunday with members of the Scouts BSA-Troop 777 who served as greeters, readers, ushers at our 9 AM service!



March 1 – CU Youth love to support each other! Our youth went to see Alisha in her school play and look forward to more opportunities to cheer each other on!

A few moments from the past month...



February 13 – The preschool PTO treated CUPS keiki to a special Lunar New Year celebration!



February 11 – The last Messy Church gathering focused on LOVE, preparing our hearts for Lent.

CUC Welcomes New Comptroller

David Yee, Church Council Chair
council-chair@centralunionchurch.org

We are pleased to welcome **Liudmila Gautreaux** as our new **Comptroller**. She is a CPA with over 10 years of progressive accounting experience. Her first day of work was March 2, 2026. Liudmila is responsible for preparing financial statements, maintaining cash controls, managing the payroll, purchasing, maintaining accounts payable and managing the accounting office operations. She was hired by and reports to the Church Council along with the Chief Operations Officer (COO), and Preschool Director.

Have you ever wondered why we have three staff positions as direct reports to the Council? It is due to our church's governance structure. Our congregational polity in the United Church of Christ is a democratic or autonomous model where **the local congregation** holds final authority over its own affairs. At Central Union Church, our leadership model separates pastoral oversight from administrative management, a deliberate choice in UCC congregational polity that works differently depending on the church's size and complexity. For larger churches (300+ members) like ours, this model is highly effective and common because it prevents a "bottleneck" where the Senior Minister is overwhelmed by business operations. It allows the Senior Minister to specialize in preaching, vision, and teaching, while the COO and Comptroller handle the complex finances and facilities. The preschool administration is handled by the Preschool Director.

The Senior Minister's Authority: In many church models, the Senior Minister is the Chief of Staff over everyone, overseeing all operations and personnel. Based on our church's bylaws and standing rules, the Senior Minister is not the sole "Chief of Staff" in the comprehensive sense that includes all personnel. In our congregation's structure, the "Head of Staff" authority is intentionally divided between religious and operational leadership. Our congregation follows a **shared leadership model** with specific limitations on the Senior Minister's supervisory role:

❖ **Head of Ministerial Staff:**

The Senior Minister's direct authority is restricted to the "Ministerial Staff" (e.g., Associate Pastors, Music Directors, or Faith Formation leaders). They lead and supervise this team as their primary spiritual and administrative head.

❖ **Divided Administrative Oversight:**

The COO, Comptroller, and Preschool Director—who represent the business, financial, and educational arms of the church—report directly to the Church Council. This means the Council, not the Senior Minister, is their legal supervisor for matters like performance reviews, hiring, and firing.

❖ **The "Collaboration" Requirement:**

The Senior Minister's role regarding these administrative leaders is one of **consultation and partnership** rather than direct command. While the Senior Minister provides input to ensure these departments align with the church's mission, they do not have the sole authority to direct their daily work.

If you see a new face around campus, it might be Liudmila. She prefers to be called Mila—say hi and please make her feel welcome!



GET TO KNOW MILA!

Mila knew she wanted to be an accountant from a young age, having watched her mom help with church finances. At 21, she followed her dream and moved from her birthplace of Russia to the United States where she earned her Master's in Accounting. In 2019, with her husband of 17 years, she moved from California to Hawai'i. Fun fact: She learned to swim and bought a kayak during the COVID lockdown when beaches were closed but ocean exercise was allowed. Water activities are now her favorite pastime. Coming from a for-profit company, Mila is excited to do work that is driven by a mission beyond financial gain. Mila hopes to be a valuable contributor to the team and looks forward to learning more about the various ministry funds and their purposes.

The Gospel According to Broadway: When Faith Meets the Stage

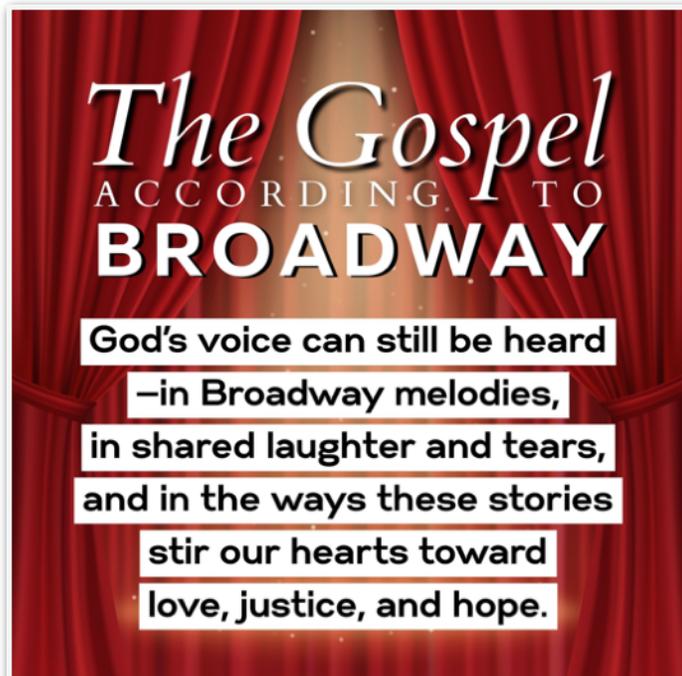
Rev. Rushan Sinnaduray, Senior Minister

This spring, our congregation is invited to experience the good news in a fresh and unexpected way through our upcoming sermon series, **The Gospel According to Broadway: The Musicals of Stephen Schwartz**.

Drawing on beloved Broadway works such as *Godspell*, *Children of Eden*, *Wicked*, *The Prince of Egypt*, and *Pippin*, this series explores how stories sung on the stage can illuminate enduring truths of faith, grace, justice, and purpose.

At the heart of this series is a conviction deeply rooted in the faith tradition of the United Church of Christ: that **God is still speaking**. This is more than a slogan. It is a theological affirmation that God's self-revelation did not end in biblical times, but continues to unfold in every generation, in every culture, and in the lives of ordinary people.

This idea is not new. In 1620, as the Pilgrims prepared to leave Holland for an uncertain future, their pastor, John Robinson, offered a farewell message that still resonates today. He urged them to remain open to God's ongoing revelation, saying he was "very confident the Lord hath more truth and light yet to break forth out of His holy Word." These words have echoed through centuries of Congregational and UCC life, reminding us that faith is not static but living, growing, and responsive to the Spirit's movement.



The Gospel According to Broadway takes that legacy seriously. Musical theater is one of the most powerful storytelling forms of modern culture, capable of expressing longing, hope, doubt, courage, and transformation. In these stories, we encounter characters wrestling with the same questions people of faith have always asked: Who is God? What does justice require of us? Where do we find meaning? How do love and grace change us?

Stephen Schwartz's musicals are especially rich in these themes. *Godspell* invites us to imagine the gospel lived out in joyful community. *Children of Eden* retells the creation story as a reflection on freedom, forgiveness, and God's persistent love. *Wicked* challenges us to look beyond simple labels of "good" and "evil" and to see with the eyes of grace. *The Prince of Egypt* proclaims God's call to liberation and courage. *Pippin* asks what it truly means to live a meaningful life.

By engaging these stories, we affirm that God continues to reveal God-self not only through ancient texts, but also through art, music, relationships, and the questions of our own time. As the United Church of Christ reminds us, our faith may be over 2,000 years old, but our thinking is not. God's voice can still be heard—in Broadway melodies, in shared laughter and tears, and in the ways these stories stir our hearts toward love, justice, and hope.

We invite you to join us for this imaginative and Spirit-filled journey, and to listen with open hearts for the God who is still speaking—on the stage, in Scripture, and in our lives today.

COMING SOON! Sermon Schedule

April 19, 2026

Godspell

The Gospel in Community

April 26, 2026

Children of Eden

Creation, Freedom, and Forgiveness

May 3, 2026

Wicked

Grace, Friendship, and the Cost of Discipleship

May 10, 2026

The Prince of Egypt

Deliverance and Divine Calling

May 17, 2026

Pippin

The Search for Meaning



The Possibilities of ‘Organized’ Religion

Kristen Young, *Communications Manager*

Building a just world where *all* God’s children can thrive demands that we radically change our systems and policies that fail to protect or that even outright punish our neighbors. There’s said to be a tipping point where social change can occur once a certain percent of the population is activated. Malcolm X said, “We’re not outnumbered, we’re out organized.”

United by common values and vision, gathered regularly, churches are uniquely positioned and equipped to create the change we want to see. Yet the world is still far from what God intends for us. What if, in addition to showing up for potlucks, we also showed up at protests calling out injustice? What if we not only joined together in hymns but also joined our voices to support life-affirming legislation like living wage and free school meals for keiki? How can we harness our collective power to also address *root causes* of the issues that burden our communities?

 This is where [Faith Action for Community Equity](#) strives to help. By connecting faith communities to social movements and tangible actions in the wider community, Faith Action aims to increase people’s capacity to **act** together to bring about change.

On February 13–14, Faith Action held a two-day training to equip leaders in relational organizing, equity strategies, spiritual grounding, and community care. Seven facilitators from [Organizing for Mission Network](#), a national group of faith-based organizers, and over 50 attendees, representing a variety of ages and communities, came together to strengthen skills and connections within our communities and deepen ministry impact. Five of us from Central Union attended this training: Ken Harding and Ronny Lynn from Community Ministry; and Youngish Adults Josann Jenks, Amy McCarthy, and myself (also a Faith Action board member). May we **BE THE CHURCH** beyond Sunday worship and grow in our skills and expand our reach so that together we can build a society where all can flourish.

REFLECTION | Amy McCarthy

I recently had the privilege of attending Faith Action’s leadership training: **Building Collective Power through Community Organizing**. How I came to be at this very special event is a reflection of our Central Union Church leaders following Jesus’ teachings by their sharing, listening, and guidance.

I had seen in the *CU Weekly* that the United Church of Christ was taking an official stance in opposition to illegal operations of our U.S. government abroad. I had been thinking of organizing a protest, but I doubted what I could achieve on my own. That Sunday I told Pastor Rushan that the UCC’s announcement made me wonder if I could get the church to help me organize a protest. Pastor Rushan said, “Do you know who you should talk to? Kristen, she is really into that . . .” That same day, I bumped into Kristen walking around the church campus and told her what Pastor Rushan suggested. She was so happy to hear from me and told me about this upcoming training. Kristen lined up my participation in the Faith Action training with support from Community Ministry which granted me a scholarship to attend. I was humbled by the passion, knowledge, and compassion of the various presenters who had traveled from all over the world to teach us. After Day One, I felt inspired, empowered, and grounded in practical steps to effect change.

Truly, our church responded to my desire to engage in social justice, not merely by helping me organize, but by teaching me how to become an organizer myself. My thought following this amazing, fruitful, educational experience was that my pastor guided me to learn to fish, rather than just giving me some fish.





Mahalo from Wai Nau

In a recent Learning Tree presentation hosted by the World Mission Ministry on February 22, we had the opportunity to hear from members of *Wai Nau*—a grassroots mutual aid group with Hawai'i connections providing direct support to people in Gaza. Members from the church and wider community gathered to hear about the work and learn where our offerings were sent. *Wai Nau* reached out to the church last year and asked to speak to our congregation to share about their work in Gaza, Palestine. After learning a bit about them, World Mission Ministry decided to donate their portion of the 2025 Christmas Eve offering to *Wai Nau* (\$3,243 through partnership with Faith Action for Community Equity) as they are a local group with global connections, supporting neighbors abroad in a place that we have been called to remember.

World Mission Ministry members Janice Trubitt, Koby Berrington, and Jodee Farm, took turns opening the presentation, reminding us of calls from our wider Church to act regarding the crisis in Gaza and to end the genocide in Palestine. They shared, “While Palestinians in Gaza continue to be denied a safe home and access to many necessities for life, they resist and persevere. Through *Wai Nau* we have an opportunity to not only learn and bear witness to what is happening in Gaza, but also to take action, to live out our faith by sharing our gifts and resources which will go toward affirming life.”

Representatives from *Wai Nau*, meaning “water for you,” gave some history of Palestine and Israel, showed staggering before-and-after images of destruction, shared the story of the partnership and creation of *Wai Nau*, explained the concept of mutual aid which gets resources directly into the hands of people in need. A highlight of the presentation was hearing from their friends and partners in Gaza who found Wi-Fi connection and were able to join by Zoom and, through an interpreter, told us about their difficult circumstances. After the sharing, a camera was carried around the room for attendees to wave and say hello to show them our support. Their smiles shone through the screen upon being reminded that the world has not abandoned them. This presentation was not only a learning opportunity for us, but a chance to show up in solidarity and allow people to share their stories and be heard; to be witnesses and remind people that we care about them.



Multiple attendees were inspired to make individual donations to *Wai Nau* following the presentation! If you'd like to support **Wai Nau Aloha Water Project**, you can learn more and give online: www.bit.ly/give2wainau



In a post on Instagram, [@wainau.alohawaterproject](https://www.instagram.com/wainau.alohawaterproject) shared the following message with photos from the presentation:

“Mahalo to [@centralunionchurch](https://www.instagram.com/centralunionchurch) for hosting our teach-in . . . ! This congregation has shown such beautiful solidarity and humanity in their steadfast support of our friends in need under siege in Gaza. It is so important as people of faith to recognize who the most needy among us are, who cries out to us for aid, and how we can truly love our neighbors. Mahalo nui for hosting, donating, and committing to a faith and advocacy that responds immediately and effectively to our friends in Palestine.”

LOOKING AHEAD

Lenten Book Study (Thursdays / Tuesdays)
February 19, 26; March 12, 19 | 10:30 AM – 12 PM
February 24; March 3, 10, 17 | 6–7:30 PM

Lenten Sermon Series: “Tell Me Something Good”
 Continuing through March 22 | 7 AM, 9 AM, 11 AM

March 14: Community Vigil for Peace



3-6 PM in the Sanctuary
 + YouTube live stream
This interfaith service will center around a speaking of the names of children killed, interspersed with prayers and readings by representatives of various faith traditions calling for peace and justice around the world.

March 15: Service of Healing & Prayer
 5:30 PM in Atherton Memorial Chapel

Observe Holy Week
 —Palm Sunday through Good Friday
 —with Central Union Church to conclude the Lenten season.

9:45 AM GIFT OF MUSIC
Guest choral ensemble

+ 10 AM WORSHIP
 one service, communion

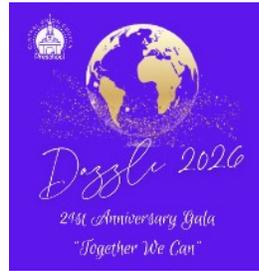
+ POTLUCK PARTY
 to follow in the Women's Building



APRIL 2 • MAUNDY THURSDAY
 Remembering Jesus' final meal with his disciples
5:30 PM Service & Supper (Parish Hall)
 RSVP for dinner by 3/27 - bit.ly/maundy2026 or 808-440-3004



APRIL 3 • GOOD FRIDAY
 Remembering Jesus' crucifixion and death
7 PM Service (Sanctuary)



Support the Preschool's annual gala fundraiser—Dazzle!

Friday, April 10, 2026
 5 PM: Dazzletini VIP Pre-Party
 6 PM: Dazzle
 Alohilani Resort in Waikiki
INFO & TICKETS: bit.ly/dazzle2026

22 local chefs will be providing the Dazzle eats!

HONOLULU CAMPUS
7 AM Worship - Atherton Memorial Chapel (AMC)
8:45 AM Gift of Music by The Honolulu Brass
9 AM Worship - Sanctuary
[youtube.com/@centralunionchurchhawaii](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC1m1m1m1m1m1m1m1m1m1m1m)
10 AM Easter Eggstravaganza! (egg hunt)
11 AM Worship - Parish Hall
11 AM Worship (Pohnpeian) - AMC

WINDWARD CAMPUS
10 AM Worship - Sanctuary

Looking for summer plans for kids?
 Kids ages 3–11 are invited to **Compassion Camp** from **July 20–24**. Suggested donation: \$65. Space is limited! Learn more and register online: bit.ly/cuc2026compassion

Easter Flowers

The Flower Committee will adorn our worship spaces with lilies for Easter! If you'd like to donate & dedicate a plant, please detach and submit the form below with a check made payable to "CENTRAL UNION CHURCH" with "Easter flowers" in the memo line by **March 29** to be listed in the bulletins on Easter Sunday, April 5!

2026 Easter Flowers - \$10 each



Name (Donor): _____ Number of Plants: _____

To the Glory of Easter!

To order online instead: bit.ly/cucflowers ^

In honor of _____

In loving memory of _____