

# THE SPIRE



All were invited to **Messy Church** on Earth Day (April 22) to get creative with recycled art, renewable energy, and earthy treats for our theme "Green & Growing."

Central Union Church and Preschool

May 2026

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

Vol. 96 - No. 5



## The Heart of Our Covenant: We Are the Church



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

Aloha Central Union 'ohana,

When we walk into the main Sanctuary here at Central Union, we're doing more than just entering a beautiful, historic building. We're stepping into a living tradition that helped shape the very idea of community and church. As we look at what's ahead for us this month, I've been thinking a lot about what it really means to be a member of a church in the Congregational tradition.

To understand who we are, you have to look back to the 17th century. Our spiritual ancestors, the Pilgrims and Puritans, sought a "Third Way" of being the Church. They moved away from the hierarchies of bishops and kings, believing instead that the Holy Spirit speaks through the gathered body of believers. This is why, in a Congregational church, the ultimate authority for almost everything is vested in you, the members.

This is a radical way to live, but it requires us to flip the script on how we see "church." In our world, we are conditioned to move through life as consumers, and we often, even if we don't realize it, bring that same "customer service" mindset into church. We find ourselves evaluating the music, critiquing the sermon, or judging the programs based on how well they cater to our personal preferences or "meet our needs" for the week. We tend to view the church

as a spiritual vending machine where we put in our time and expect a specific product in return, or a subscription service where our financial pledge buys us a seat and a say in the "amenities."

But membership in the Congregational tradition is something much deeper than a transaction. The church isn't a business providing a service to its clients; it is a community of people who have covenanted to serve God together. When we stop seeing ourselves as customers and start seeing ourselves as the people called to be Christ's hand and feet in the world, everything changes. We move from asking, "What did I get out of today?" to "How did I help us be the church today?"



*(continued from page 2)*

We aren't the audience; we're the actors. We are the ones called to **be** the church, and as members, we're the ones who do the hard work of the gospel. You might have noticed that the back of our bulletin now says: "Our Ministers Are Every One of Our Members." That's not just a nice sentiment, it's the truth! Our staff are here to provide the support and "backstage" help to make sure we can all succeed in our work of being the church. Our clergy are here to keep you grounded in God's call and to encourage, empower, and equip *you* to go out and make a difference in the world.

So, how do we live this out? It comes down to a few simple, but deep, commitments:

- **Showing Up:** Regular attendance in worship and in community is the heartbeat of our life together. Your presence in the pews matters because it's a way of telling the person sitting next to you that they aren't alone in their faith.
- **Getting Involved:** Because the authority is yours, the work is yours, too. Our ministry only happens when you share your unique "time and talent." Whether you're volunteering in the Thrift Shop, teaching Sunday School, singing in the choir or serving on a committee, you're the hands and feet of our mission and ministry.
- **Giving Back:** Financial support is a spiritual practice. It's our way of saying "thank you" for God's gifts and ensuring that Central Union remains a "Church in the Garden" that can offer hope to everyone who walks through our doors.

Being a member here is a big deal—it's a partnership in a great spiritual adventure. Let's keep showing up for each other, serving together, and remembering that at the end of the day: **we are the church.**

With gratitude for the ministry we share together,

Pastor Rushan





## Council Talks Politics and Religion

Aloha Central Union Church  
'ohana,

The Rewick Board Room was  
filled at the April 23rd

Council meeting, with both Council and church  
members in attendance. The topic – politics and  
religion – clearly drew strong interest. The  
Council discussed whether Central Union Church  
should formally commit to being politically  
nonpartisan.

To help frame the conversation for those not at  
the meeting, we can reflect on guidance from  
UCC General Minister, Rev. Dr. Karen Georgia  
Thompson:

*“Politics, by definition: the activities associated with the  
governance of a country or other area, especially the  
debate or conflict among individuals or parties having  
or hoping to achieve power. We are all involved in  
politics whether we choose to be intentionally so.  
Choices to vote or not vote are political. Choices to  
vote for one party over another are political. These  
are activities associated with governance. Advocacy by  
its very nature is political. When we express  
expectations of just and compassionate leadership  
and governance that, too, is political.”*

There appears to be **confusion between** being  
engaged in politics, which is **participation in the  
public square, and partisan politics** which  
aligns a person or organization with one party and is  
unquestioning in that support. Partisan politics are a  
violation of the separation of church and state. **The  
church should not be involved in partisan  
politics, telling people how to vote, or endorsing  
political candidates.** Partisan politics are very evident  
in these days where so called “Christian” nationalists  
have no qualms about who they voted for and why.  
They use faulty theology to justify support for  
candidates while claiming God’s presence on their side  
over everyone else’s.”

Thompson, Karen Georgia. [“Politics and the Church.”](http://www.ucc.org/politics-and-the-church)  
On My Mind Today. United Church of Christ,  
[www.ucc.org/politics-and-the-church](http://www.ucc.org/politics-and-the-church).

The Council’s goal was not to determine whether  
political activism is appropriate for CUC, that  
responsibility rests with the Senior Minister.  
Instead, the Council focused on identifying  
boundaries that help navigate the fine line  
between social engagement, political activity,  
and partisan involvement.

There was general agreement that  
nonpartisanship should be the guiding principle.  
The Council discussed a framework for defining  
nonpartisanship at CUC, proposing that actions  
should meet all five of the following criteria:

1. We do not support or oppose any political  
party (i.e. Republican vs. Democrat).
2. We do not support or oppose any candidate  
for elective public office.
3. We may support or oppose political public  
policy issues or government actions (such as  
legislation or executive orders), based solely  
on CUC’s values and mission. In doing so, we  
remain issue-focused and nonpartisan,  
without referencing campaigns or candidates.
4. We may speak on social, moral, or ethical  
issues, even when those issues are part of  
political discourse – while remaining focused  
on the issues rather than political campaigns  
or candidates.
5. We frame our support or opposition as  
matters of faith and direct them toward our  
congregation.

The meeting concluded without a formal vote on  
these criteria, as the Council seeks input from the  
broader congregation first. We invite your  
thoughts and perspectives. Please share your  
feedback with a Council member or reach out via  
email.

We look forward to hearing from you.

**David Yee**, Church Council Chair,  
[council-chair@centralunionchurch.org](mailto:council-chair@centralunionchurch.org)

# Congrats to the Class of 2026!



**Casey Jones**  
*Graduate of Hawai'i Baptist Academy*

Casey is the daughter of Nicole Jones and has been an active youth at CUC. She is considering her college options and future plans.



**Andrew Louie**  
*Valedictorian & Honor Graduate of Kaiser High School*

Andrew is the eldest son of Jimmy and Kathy Louie. He'll be studying Computer Science at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa.



**Rachel Schmidt**  
*Summa Cum Laude, Jessup University in California*

Rachel is the granddaughter of Connie and Glenn Uejio, daughter of Rebecca Uejio Schmidt, and has played flute several times in our church.

She majored in Education with 2 minors in Music and Bible Studies. She will go on to teach music at a public charter school.



**Melissa Thach**  
*Education Specialist in School Psychology, Chaminade University*

Melissa has been working on her EdS over the past few years while also working full-time at Sacred Hearts Academy and part-time as our Youth Director at Central Union. She

shares, "I have learned so much and become a better educator and advocate for my students." "This achievement represents the dedication to do my part to make the world better for all our keiki."



**McCrea White**  
*Associate of Science degree in Audio Engineering, Honolulu Community College*

McCrea has been our AV Technician since February 2025, assisting with the live stream, sound, and slides in our 9 AM and 11 AM worship services. He will be leaving Hawai'i after graduation to pursue a bachelor's degree at Belmont University. He shares

with us, "Thank you for being kind to me for the time I was there." We give our gratitude for his time with us and send him with much aloha as he furthers his education!

**Congratulations to ALL the graduates of the Class of 2026!**

*This significant milestone is a testament to your hard work, dedication, and perseverance.*

*We joyfully celebrate you and your accomplishment and pray for God's grace and guidance upon you as you move forward with greater knowledge, courage, and possibilities.*

*May your future be filled with opportunities and may the light of Christ illuminate your path!*

# Strategic Plan: Reclaiming Our Sacred Why

At a Learning Tree presentation on April 26, Pastor Rushan led a conversation about his Strategic Plan for our church. Together we explored our Spirit-led vision for a future where we “worship deeply, grow faithfully, welcome radically, and live boldly” while learning how we each play a part in this journey. Learn more:

## I. STRATEGIC VISION



**PURPOSE STATEMENT:** At Central Union Church, we believe our purpose is simple but profound:

*TO GLORIFY GOD BY MAKING DISCIPLES OF JESUS CHRIST—PEOPLE WHO LOVE GOD, LOVE OTHERS, AND LIVE TRANSFORMED LIVES THROUGH GOD’S LOVE THAT NEVER FAILS.*

**VISION STATEMENT:** Reclaiming Our Sacred Why: In a time of seismic change, we are choosing not to tinker with what used to be. Instead, we are anchoring ourselves in what must always be—love that never fails.

*WE ENVISION A SPIRIT-LED FUTURE ROOTED IN FAITH, SHAPED BY GRACE, AND ALIVE WITH POSSIBILITY. A FUTURE WHERE WE WORSHIP DEEPLY, GROW FAITHFULLY, WELCOME RADICALLY, AND LIVE BOLDLY.*

## II. STRATEGIC PILLARS & GOALS

### 1. WORSHIP AND MUSIC

Goal: Deepen spiritual engagement through transformative worship experiences.

Key Initiatives:

- Expand and develop a variety of alternative worship opportunities including, but not limited to, Jazz Vespers, Dinner Church and the Service of Healing and Prayer.

- Enhance our liturgy and music to foster deeper sacred connection.
- Invest in worship leadership development and training.
- Develop pathways for recruitment of lay volunteers for all aspects of worship leadership and participation such as choir members, additional music groups, liturgists and readers.

Success Metrics:

- Increased attendance and participation in diverse worship services.
- Growth in volunteer worship leaders and musicians.

### 2. FAITH FORMATION AND GROWTH

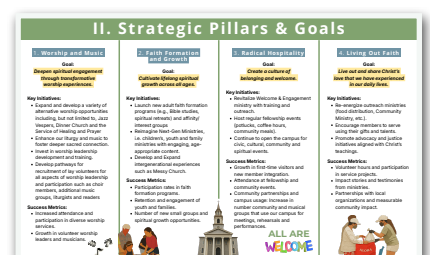
Goal: Cultivate lifelong spiritual growth across all ages.

Key Initiatives:

- Launch new adult faith formation programs (e.g., Bible studies, spiritual retreats) and affinity/interest groups.
- Reimagine Next-Gen Ministries, i.e. children’s, youth and family ministries with engaging, age-appropriate content.
- Develop and Expand intergenerational experiences such as Messy Church.

Success Metrics:

- Participation rates in faith formation programs.
- Retention and engagement of youth and families.
- Number of new small groups and spiritual growth opportunities.



### 3. RADICAL HOSPITALITY

Goal: Create a culture of belonging and welcome.

Key Initiatives:

- Revitalize Welcome & Engagement ministry with training and outreach.
- Host regular fellowship events (potlucks, coffee hours, community meals).
- Continue to open the campus for civic, cultural, community and spiritual events.

Success Metrics:

- Growth in first-time visitors and new member integration.
- Attendance at fellowship and community events.
- Community partnerships and campus usage: Increase in number community and musical groups that use our campus for meetings, rehearsals and performances.

### 4. LIVING OUT FAITH

Goal: Live out and share Christ's love that we have experienced in our daily lives.

Key Initiatives:

- Re-energize outreach ministries (food distribution, Community Ministry, etc.).
- Encourage members to serve using their gifts and talents.
- Promote advocacy and justice initiatives aligned with Christ's teachings.

Success Metrics:

- Volunteer hours and participation in service projects.
- Impact stories and testimonies from ministries.
- Partnerships with local organizations and measurable community impact.

### III. IMPLEMENTATION TIMELINE

YEAR 1–2:

- Launch pilot programs in each strategic area.
- Conduct regular Congregational listening sessions/Congregational meetings.
- Form and Re-Form strategic ministry teams.

YEAR 2–3:

- Scale successful initiatives.
- Evaluate progress and adjust strategies.
- Deepen community engagement and partnerships.

YEAR 4–5:

- Celebrate milestones.
- Renew vision and strategic goals.
- Expand leadership development and sustainability planning.

### IV. LEADERSHIP & ACCOUNTABILITY

- Strategic Ministry Teams for each pillar.
- Quarterly Reviews with church leadership.
- Annual Congregational Report to share progress and invite feedback.



# LOOKING AHEAD

## May 15: Dinner & Documentary (View 13th)

@ 6-9 PM in the Parish Hall hosted by the Reimagining Public Safety in Hawai'i Coalition. This event is FREE, all are welcome!

RSVP [bit.ly/13honolulu](https://bit.ly/13honolulu)



**May 16: Community Vigil for Peace** @ 3-6 PM in the Sanctuary. View live stream: [bit.ly/vigil4peace](https://bit.ly/vigil4peace)

## May 17: Graduate Recognition Sunday

**May 24: Pentecost Sunday**  
**ONE worship service @ 10 AM**  
**in the Sanctuary - Wear RED!**



## May 28: Church Council Meeting @ 5 PM

### GUEST PREACHERS IN WORSHIP\*

**May 31:** Josann Jenks, Kahu Pono  
**June 7:** Rev. Dr. George Scott  
**June 14:** Rev. Lauren Buck Medeiros  
*\*Pastor Rushan will be on vacation*

**June 7: Wear Orange** for gun violence awareness

**June 11-13:** Hawai'i Conference United Church of Christ - 'Aha Pae'āina @ Waipahu UCC

**June 14: Celebrating Juneteenth in worship**

**June 21: NEW SERMON SERIES**  
*Beyond Belief*



**July 19: ONE worship service @ 10 AM in the Sanctuary - Summer Celebration & Potluck**

**July 24-26: Youth trip to Kaua'i**

**July 26: Stewardship season begins for 2027**

### ~ Remembering our Saints ~

The family of Carol Kellogg has informed us that she died on January 28, 2026. May Carol rest in peace.

**Baptized into the universal church and the body of Christ on April 19, 2026:**

Lily Grace Foster  
Luke Kazuyoshi Yamagata

## Help us Eggceed Eggspectations!

Since Easter, our Children's Ministry has been collecting funds to support flood relief efforts in Hawai'i through the [Lāhui Foundation](https://www.lahui.org/). They will be accepting donations for their Lenten/Easter Project through **May 24,**

**Pentecost Sunday. Donate** online at [bit.ly/give2cuc](https://bit.ly/give2cuc) (or click "GIVE" on [centralunionchurch.org](https://centralunionchurch.org)) and select "Children Ministry - Lenten/Easter Project" in the drop-down menu. Or send a check to the church with "CM Easter Project" in the memo line.



## THRIFT SHOP NEW HOURS!

Honolulu & Windward:  
**Wednesdays & Saturdays**  
from  
**9 AM – 1 PM**