

The Spire

Photograph by: Jordan Clifford

Central Union Church and Preschool, October 2020
"We Engage and Embrace ALL as we seek to Embody Christ!" Vol. 90 - No. 10

Pastor's Page

Rev. Brandon Durán, Acting Senior Minister



God is a storyteller. In Genesis God creates by the word. Long before the Hebrew scriptures were reduced to writing they were passed along through oral tradition carried by the breath of the Holy Spirit. In the Gospels, Jesus taught through parables. These stories often pulled upon the scriptures of the past and interwove contemporary issues in order to surface deep spiritual truths. Throughout the Bible, God is telling us the story of the Creator's relationship with creation. And, throughout the Bible, God encourages us to tell the story of our lives and the stories of what God has done.

"Give thanks to the Lord, for God is good; His love endures forever. Let the redeemed of the Lord tell their story—those God redeemed from the hand of the foe, those God gathered from the lands, from east and west, from north and south." – Psalm 107:1-3

The testimonies we share today become beacons and guideposts for future generations. When we speak authentically of the ways we experience and respond to God, our stories become touchstones of inspiration for others. This is especially true when we speak from places of struggle. This year has been a time of hardship and challenge. Yet, in the midst of difficulties, God has drawn near. God has spoken with promises of comfort and with calls to act in faith. The Holy Spirit has been at work in the people of Central Union Church.

In this special edition of The Spire, CUC members of various generations and situations have given their testimony of how they are enduring the pandemic. They tell their story of how God has been revealed in their lives. May their voices in these pages encourage and inspire you to tell your story and to praise our God.

Rev. Mary Herbig, Minister of Congregational Life

1 Thessalonians 5:11 - *Encourage one another and build up each other, as indeed you are doing.*

Friends, one of the ways that we hear God's stillspeaking voice is through the voices of one another. Throughout this COVID pandemic, we have been so grateful for the organic communication that has grown among our church 'ohana! We have seen relationships flourish as church members have checked in with one another and offered care and support, created email prayer chains, and joined self-led small groups.

Your church leaders and staff have tried to supplement this organic growth by creating more opportunities for connection:

1. For the first few months of the pandemic, we coordinated volunteer callers to reach out to our kupuna weekly or bi-weekly, ensuring that everyone has food, prescriptions, support, and prayer. What a blessing it has been to watch these new friendships blossom!

2. Throughout the last six months, staff and volunteers have delivered essential supplies, groceries, and even flowers to our most vulnerable members, who have been unable to leave their homes.

3. We have set up a COVID-relief fund to help support church and community members who are experiencing financial crisis during this time.

4. We have offered additional small group opportunities so that those who are feeling isolated have dedicated time to connect with others.

5. Our Diaconate and Senior Services ministries are developing a system to regularly check in with those among us who are most vulnerable. They will be making calls, sending cards, and offering compassion and prayer.

6. One of our church members has worked diligently with Arcadia to ensure that all of their residents are able to attend our online worship service if they would like.

7. Several members of our staff continue to dedicate a portion of their time to making calls and offering prayer. Our hope is to reach out to as many church members as we can and we look forward to talking with you soon!



Church, thank you for all you have already done to help extend our care network. We would love to continue expanding this system! If you can spend 30 minutes each week helping to make calls, write cards, or even just pray for others, please contact Pastor Mary at mary-herbig@centralunionchurch.org. May we continue to follow God's call to love one another.

Council Talking Points

Martha Balkin, Council Chair

Throughout the Bible, there are repeated exhortations to spread the Good News. Over and over there are references to *go and tell* of God's transformative love and peace, made manifest in Jesus Christ. There are also countless calls to *listen*. What becomes readily apparent is that we, as a people, are asked to *connect*.

In this time of Covid, we find the call to communicate to be more critical than ever. We crave the ability to come together as a community, to share our joys and sorrows, our hopes for a better tomorrow and our faith that with God's help, we will persevere.

Despite our social isolation, or perhaps because of it, we are finding ways to connect. Whether it's new medium, like Zoom or other electronic means, or good old fashioned notes and phone calls, we are reaching out to one another. As a Council, we have been working on ways to "up our game", to be more intentional in bringing information to the congregation and establishing channels to connect with one another.

Here are some highlights from our September meeting, sharing the good news that is happening at Central Union Church.

Central Union Preschool has entered its fourth week of the current session. The children and families are comfortable with the routine. The summer provided them a good opportunity to practice for this year. CUPS request for funding through the Cares Act was approved to cover expenses brought about by the pandemic. The money is being used for sanitizing and other required equipment.

Adult Day Care has been converted to a lease arrangement with Arcadia as opposed to the previous management agreement which was in place. Rents are starting to come into the church and there is a plan to offset some of the losses that occurred earlier in the year due to the shutdown and ensuing lowered census. There was a return of \$54,000 of capital to the church from the original opening.

Ministry Updates - while many ministries have found that some of their normal activities have been curtailed, others are finding ways to provide service, outreach to our local community and the world, and care for our members. More to come in next month's Spire!

Aha Pae'aina – Central Union sends 5 delegates

to the annual meeting of the Hawaii conference. Evy Hao, Ken Harding, Dusty Santos, Peggy Anne Siegmund and I will serve as delegates. The virtual event will be held on Oct 10, 2020.



Stewardship – Bruce

Luxton will serve as this year's Stewardship chair. The church is working with an advisory group called Horizons Stewardship in the development of our stewardship campaign. We will be developing an electronic pledge card. We are also exploring the possibility of an advance campaign, followed by a full campaign starting in January.

Food Scarcity/Help is on the Way – Central Union has been participating in food donation drives with Help is on the Way. We are now looking at using our location to become a distribution site. Food is provided in preassembled bags. This is a good use of our centrally located campus and helps address the growing need of food insecurity in our community.

Treasurers Report – Craig McGinnis and Ashley Cambe worked diligently to present a webinar to the congregation on September 17 on Central Union's current financial picture. For those who were not able to view the webinar, you may request the link by emailing news@centralunionchurch.org.

Ministry Budgets - Craig also reports that this is budget season. Requests are being sent out to Ministry chairs to begin assembling the budget for 2021.

We concluded our meeting with a hymn, led by Rosemary Eberhardt, "We've a Story to Tell to the Nations". How fitting to be reminded during this time, that our "darkness will turn to dawning, and the dawning to noonday bright". We will keep singing and shouting from the rooftops our belief that God's Love Never Fails.

Reflections: HAMBURGER - GKOMD

By: Glenn Uejio

I've been doing volunteer work with our USA veterans since 2013. In January, before the "stay-at-home" orders, I was in a briefing with the head of Hospice at the VA. The doc tells me, "Glenn, new guy doesn't have much time with us."

I go to his room at 6:30 am and hear his one request, "I want a hamburger!" I explain that breakfast is coming soon but with ham, sausage, or bacon.

"I want a hamburger!!"

I check with the head of the kitchen but no can do for breakfast. I check with the charge nurse who says that the new guy has been asking for a hamburger every hour since last night. I go back to the new guy and ask, "What do you want on

your hamburger?"

"Ketchup."

I head to L&L and get one special order for him. The new guy had a hamburger for breakfast and he was ecstatic! When God cares for us or calls us to care for another, I call it, "God knocking on my door!" (GKOMD).

He died the next morning.

Starting in March, I have not been able to visit our veterans and I miss them. But on March 25th, I sent my first letter to one of my guys, a Korean War Sailor. Since then, my happy wife of 47 years, Connie, and I have been keeping count of the notes I've sent to my guys. I've mailed 286

letters of encouragement to my guys.

I'm a retired rubbah slippah salesman, raker man, and currently unemployed harp mover. And I listen when God is knocking on my door (GKOMD!).



Reflections

By: Nicholas Nagel

It's been 6 months since the pandemic decided to enter our lives. For many people there has been a serious disruption of their lives – for others not so much.

We've been blessed in our situation. In our family, all adults have maintained their jobs. The grandkids have their school set up to operate remotely using Webex. Children seem to be learning from the experience.

In some ways life is better. We're enjoying beaches and parks that are mostly empty. The water in the ocean seems cleaner, and there is parking available – even in Waikiki.

Families are eating dinner together, and the grandkids are helping to cook some of our family's daily meals.

The Internet has been adapted to this situation, and now provides us with meals and groceries

delivered to our door. Amazon can provide you with almost any item you need – and they deliver most items in 2 days!

We've come up with a new term – "Binge Watching". With over 20 "streaming" services we can watch hours of television for less than the cost of a movie ticket.

Church services are available online. This past Sunday, we held our services as usual, followed by a virtual "Aloha Lanai" where we could meet, see each other, and catch up on our lives.

To mask or not to mask – that is the question.

It will be interesting to see what other surprises that are in store for the next 6 months. Stay tuned.....



Reflections

By: Andrew Feng, M.D.



I first heard about the potentially lethal outbreak in mid-December while I was in Samoa helping with their own outbreak of measles. The reports coming out of Wuhan were ominous. Soon enough the outbreak became a true pandemic. Our son was able to escape NYC just in time, but others like his opera instructor ended up on the ventilator. Our daughter also returned home early from college when virtually all schools began shutting down. So one silver lining has been having our two children home for these past several months like it was before they graduated from high school.

Eventually, the ongoing pandemic began hitting Hawaii harder following Memorial Day weekend. More businesses continued to close permanently, and unemployment sky-rocketed. That plus the atrocities leading to the eruption of the Black Lives Matter movement cast very dark clouds across the nation, and the news broadcasts reminded everyone each night how much we were all spiraling downward. It was around this time that our family “got back to church” via Zoom services on Sunday. I actually tuned in to the Zoom service for the first time mainly for Diane’s mother because I was in charge of taking care of her while Diane was on call in the hospital. The service was revitalizing not only for her mother but also for me to feel spiritually supported during these times. The Communion part caught me off guard, though, as I scrambled to find whatever I could for the Sacrament (I don’t know

where anything is kept), but thankfully, Connie Uejio’s harp piece was long enough! Since then, we’ve all tuned in to Sunday services and have felt reconnected with the Word of God and with our spiritual family. This has especially helped me during these last couple of months of rising pandemic cases being seen among patients and colleagues in the Children’s Hospital.

In the hospital, the pandemic has also created a “Russian Roulette” scenario among healthcare workers. Going to work in the hospital is like entering a war zone while knowing on some level that we may become infected despite strict isolation procedures. This has made us feel particularly vulnerable not only for ourselves but also for our loved ones at home, particularly Diane’s 91 year-old mother. Therefore, healthcare workers who have been potentially exposed to infected patients often opt to self-quarantine in a hotel for 14 days at a time, which I recently did earlier this month. Being alone away from home was miserable and filled me with isolation and loneliness. My routine was just going to work and then back to the hotel, and then I would typically skip dinner simply because I didn’t have any interest to get take-out.

I’m happily back home now, but at any given day at work I may need to care for another COVID-19-positive patient, and at that point I will go back into self-quarantine again. Meanwhile, I look at all the “anti-mask” protesters on the news and in social media, and despite knowing that these are just a minority of people, it’s still disheartening. There is an end in sight with the new vaccines imminently on the horizon, but we will have endured through an awful toll upon reaching that point. Our faith will be tested, for some more than others, and it will be faith that helps us to move forward.

Reflections By: Karen Swofford

It was interesting to realize that since March 2020 – approximately six months ago, our whole daily lives of scheduled events and timetables of appointments and dependable relationships with family and friends were catapulted into an array of fear of the one word: “Covid.” It was a time of face masks and gloves and social distances of never to “hug” or “touch” good dear friends or acquaintances. Never to see a genuine smile hidden behind homemade or medical and plastic masks. I was wary of meeting with dearest family members and friends as I did

not know of their “tracing” – a new word into our daily vocabulary. Who were they last with? Are they carriers of this horrid virus that closed our world? We are interactive people and this personal interaction faded away. I long to have a lovely cocktail/dinner event with special family and friends and now, with all the government mandates, there is no place to meet and enjoy one another. And the harshest lash of all: when our beloved gathering of the Lord’s place was shuttered according to government mandates for fear of infecting your church’s family. I long to return to the Sanctuary – my week ends on Sunday and being on Sunday at Central Union Church.

Reflections From Our Young People

Hokulani Bezemer

"Doing school from home was difficult at the beginning, but then it got easier. I'm grateful to be back in school now where everyone is still safe and healthy. Though I've been worried at times, prayer has comforted me. I've enjoyed doing new things with my family, like driving around the island with my dad and learning to bake with my mom."



Crystal Fredrick

"When the pandemic started, I felt bored and lonely, like I was all by myself. But even though the youth don't meet together, we meet online. Even though I don't meet up with all of my family, I still have my family I live with and we get more time to spend with each other. I know I have God in my life."



Kapai Santos

"I tried to look at the positive instead of the negative. I had time to spiritually grow with my family, we would often have fellowship and even gather on Zoom or FaceTime with other families from Pohnpei. Before, I would have to be reminded to pray, and now I pray on my own and spend about 30 minutes in prayer at bedtime. My dad always reminds me that I am a child of God. Though I've felt lonely during the pandemic, I've spent more time with God."



Liana Rae Bermudes

"I'm thankful that all my family is safe and healthy and I still have those who I live with to keep me company. I have God with me every day, I know that I can always go to God if I need help with anything. Even though school online is challenging and I can't interact with all my friends, I can still see some of my classmates."



Charlotte Neemia

"I've seen God's love in people's care, like my mom who is doing a lot to keep others safe and healthy. Keeping in touch with friends through Instagram has brought me comfort and I've also noticed that this is a great time for many families to spend with each other as many of us are not as busy."



Reflections

By: Melinda Dallass

As a family, we've had many ups and downs during this pandemic. We are grateful that Colleen is an essential worker, but that's been a source of stress too since she works in a hospital where the risk of contracting COVID-19 is higher. My biggest personal struggle has been with the isolation with two young children at home, and watching them endure loneliness as well. 2020 has brought so many things that were

beyond our ability to prepare for or control.

One of the verses I meditate on every day is 1 Corinthians 16:14

"Let everything you do be done in love". This is such a difficult thing to manage on a regular basis, let alone times like these. God has shown such faithfulness and grace to us though. His mercy and love have shined on us through so many acts of kindness from neighbors, friends and even strangers. Though we are in uncertain times, the evidence of His love is everywhere we look.

Reflections

By: Maurina Ludwig

During this time of uncertainty, the current COVIC 19 pandemic has heightened uncertainty over everything. Although I am very thankful and grateful that I still have a job and roof over my head. But the most trying time of this season was when the pandemic was at its peak. My mother lost her battle with kidney disease on April 1st. That was the heart breaking moment of my life that I could still remember as if it just happened yesterday. I remember feeling my heart aching and I was calling her longing to speak to her for the last time. When I was in distress, a lot of encouraging and comforting verses came to my mind reminding me to be strong and courageous for the Lord is with me.

Having a relationship with God had helped me stay strong and faithful during this challenging season. I rely on Him knowing that our God is the only source of true security and we can trust Him. He cares for us as mentioned in Psalm 121 and we can corroborate it throughout all of Scripture and many of us have experienced it throughout our lives. We suffer like everyone else, but we can do it with the peace that God gives us knowing that our Heavenly Father is watching over us. As in one of my favorite song goes, Christ beside me, Christ before me, Christ behind me, King of my heart; Christ within me, Christ below me, Christ above me never to part. I envision myself being caged in with God's grace of protection! God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power, love and self-control (2 Tim. 1: 7) that enables us to face circumstances with confidence and in complete peace (Isaiah 26: 3).

Reflections

By: Jocelyn Pratt

2020 with all the challenges and adversities could have been one of most depressing years of my life. However, it has been a testimony to Letting Go and Letting God.

A year ago, I was miserable in my job which had drastically changed in description and duties from my hire a year earlier. I was not looking forward to starting a new job search and struggling with planning how I wanted to spend the next few years leading up to retirement. Then COVID 19 happened, bringing with it the opportunity to look at things in a different light.

The uncertainty along with upheaval in our country, was rattling at times. Built on my foundation of faith in Christ, I have daily put my trust in the Lord. The key has been believing God has greater plans than I, and staying focused on the positives:

- 1) Overwhelming Gratitude for health and life.
- 2) Continued employment and income teleworking from home
- 3) No more daily 2 – 3 hours in Pali traffic
- 4) A renewed focus and sense of purpose

5) Making a difference helping our 700+ hotel staff to overcome job uncertainties and health fears while adapting to protocol changes and prevention procedures

6) Expanding and learning new administration and technology skills - a plus for future retirement endeavors

7) Improved professional relationships and communication with greater respect

8) Amazed at successfully being home with my husband and our relationship grown over 39 years

9) A deeper relationship with our small but mighty Central Union Windward Ohana!

10) Renewed Faith in the ability of our CUW to truly survive and hopefully thrive.

My hope for our future and my relationship with Christ has deepened with devoted quiet time for prayer, reading, and meditation. Despite COVID-19, wonderful things have fallen into place by Letting Go and Letting God!



Our History: How Central Union Got Its Name

Rosemary Eberhardt, Church Historian

When the merger of Bethel Union and Fort Street Church took place, meetings were held to decide on a new name. Suggested names: Union, Grace, Central, Bethany, First Union, Mission, United, Calvary, Pilgrim, Central Union, Missionary, United Congregation, First Congregational, Park, New, New Union, Congregational, Plymouth, Church of the Redeemer, Bethel Union, Immanuel, Bethel and Fort Street.

Each member who decided to join was given a ballot to be signed and returned. Result: Central Union 110, Church of the Redeemer 40, Congregational 2, Fort Street 1, Union 1. Total 154. A resolution was passed, "This Church shall be known as the Central Union Church of Honolulu." Article I of the Constitution approved November 19, 1887.



2020 CUC Women's Retreat: Sisters, Sand & Spirit!

Wouldn't it be wonderful to get away to Camp Mokule'ia for a little RETREAT?

We can't promise to take you "physically" to the North Shore, but we CAN promise a fun way for your HEART to travel to Camp Moluke'ia and the 2020 CUC Women's Retreat! Smiles promised! We invite you to register at <https://forms.gle/W5xo5E4QHWqiK7987> for this year's retreat.

Learn More About Food Insecurity

Food insecurity describes a household's inability to provide enough food for every person to live an active, healthy life.¹ Food insecurity goes beyond simply hunger, but points to deeper underlying factors that can lead to risk of hunger. It's when our kupuna have to make decisions between meals or medicines. It's when our keiki, who normally find access to a healthy meal at school, have to do distance learning on an empty stomach. The Covid-19 pandemic has created what, for many was a state of fragile existence into full crisis subsistence.

According to the Hawaii Foodbank, "Since the onset of the pandemic, food insecurity in Hawaii has grown by more than 60% representing the fifth highest percentage increase in the United States. Now, nearly a quarter of a million Hawaii residents are currently struggling with hunger. Among them are out-of-work parents, isolated kupuna and 1 in 4 keiki."²

Central Union is working to address this pressing need and live in to our call to "feed the hungry". Working in partnership with Help is on the Way, we are developing further ways to make sure that those who are in need in our community are able to receive help. Details to come. If you would like to volunteer on this effort, please contact Karl Hedberg at khedberghawaii@gmail.com.

To learn more about Food Insecurity, visit these sites:

<https://www.feedingamerica.org> ¹

<https://hawaiifoodbank.org> ²

<https://hiappleseed.org/publications/feeding-our-kupuna>

LOVE NEVER FAILETH