

LOVE NEVER FAILETH



The Spire

Central Union Church and Preschool December 2020
“We Engage and Embrace ALL as we seek to Embody Christ!” Vol. 90 - No. 12



Pastor's Page

Rev. Brandon Durán, Acting Senior Minister

I cannot remember his name but I remember his voice. He sounded like a cup of hot chocolate with marshmallows when it's cold out. I remember how effortlessly he said, "Quirinius." And it seemed as though every year this elder in our church was chosen to read the Christmas story in Luke 2.

Every Christmas, pastors wrestle with finding new ways to approach the Christmas story. We look for a clever turn of phrase or we expand upon minor characters. Pastors dive into the details of those 20 or so verses from the Gospel of Luke hoping to find a new vantage point for the congregation. We think we have to come up with a fresh take, a relevant take on an ancient story. Yet maybe this year, we just need the story told straight without any jingle bells and whistles.

Over the last nine months we've worn thin words like "unprecedented" and phrases like, "unlike any other." We've adapted to new norms. We've been flexible with fluctuating protocols. With the daily doses of change I am finding great comfort in a story that stays the same. There is a steadfast assurance in ancient stories retold.

"And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered...Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem...He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child..."

You know how this unfolds. You've seen the pageant. You've sung the carols. There are no last-minute changes to Joseph and Mary's itinerary because of case counts. The kings will not be quarantined. Even in this unusual year the Christmas story stays the same. The enduring permanence reminds us that among the upheaval and uncertainty of today there remains bedrock truths which will not be muzzled and cannot be canceled.

"The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel' which means 'God with us'.

God is with us in the warm memories of Christmas' past.

God is with us in the songs of faith sung in homes and in our cars.

God is with us in the tweaked traditions of 2020.

I have no illusions about this year. I know that for many (most? all?) it will be a difficult holiday season. Separation from loved ones, lost wages, and concerns that we'll get caught by the latest wave all threaten to cast a pall over the Christmas season. When the anxieties and uncertainties begin to bear down, I return to the steadfast story of our faith.

"Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people..."

The God of grace and mercy who was with those shepherds two millennia ago is the same God who is with us today. And just as they saw how the glory of the Lord shone in the darkness of night so will we also see how the love of God will shine in these challenging times. We've already seen glimpses of it.

Circumstances will change but the story remains the same.

God is with us. God is love. God redeems, renews, reconciles all things. Thanks be to God!

I know why the members of my childhood church asked the same elder to read the story every year. It wasn't just because he had a comforting voice. It was because he was a loving and gracious man. He did more than read the story of God's gift of love. He embodied the story of God's love.

Church, may we take comfort in the Christmas story retold and may our lives become a retelling of the timeless truth that God's love is with us.

Council Talking Points

Martha Balkin, Council Chair

The people walking in darkness have seen a great light;

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

Isaiah 9:2,6

In Advent, we experience a sense of hope and expectation. And those feelings have never resonated more strongly than in this year. We hope for a happier, healthier 2021 when we can all be together again, vaccinated against the ill-effects of Covid and able to return to a sense of normalcy in our lives.



Expectation surrounded the birth of the Messiah. And yet, we know the rest of the story. The kingdom that the people expected and hoped for, was not the kingdom that Christ came to bring. His message of God's kingdom was beyond the imaginings of human hopes and expectations.

And perhaps there is a lesson in that for us in this time. My Christmas prayer for Central Union Church is that we hope for God to be revealed in the coming year, not confined by our desires to "return to normal", but unleashed so that "Glory to God in the Highest" is reflected in all we do.

Normally I would share highlights from our Council meeting. However, we combine our November and December meeting, so that our next meeting is not scheduled for another week. I do want to highlight a few things we will be discussing.

Serving Aloha has given our congregation a tremendous opportunity to bless our community. Each Wednesday over 30 volunteers from CUC, Help is on the Way and other community volunteers gather to distribute food to those in need. Donations are received from Aloha Harvest and other sources and reassembled so that each person receives a free bag of food. We have been averaging over 300 households each week. The incidence of food insecurity is on the rise in Honolulu and across the country. As we work to combat hunger, it is wonderful to see our mission in action.

Our Stewardship campaign is being headed up by Bruce Luxton. All Things New is the theme this year and reflects a shift in thinking about giving. Rather than simply looking at how much is needed to keep the lights on, All Things New asks us to think about giving as a spiritual practice. We will be provided the opportunity to reflect on all we have been given, and how sharing these gifts is an active expression of thanksgiving and love. Our Stewardship campaign will be conducted in January (that's something new!)

Since May, the Council has worked very hard to ensure that the church remain financially viable despite the many impacts to our funding streams as a result of the Covid pandemic. Our Budget meeting will be held on January 31, 2021. Details are still being worked out, but please mark your calendars now.

Merry Christmas and a very healthy and happy New Year. May your hearts overflow with the hope, peace, joy and love of the season.

Sisters, Sand and Spirit! Women's Retreat 2020 had them all!

By: Lisa B. Haley, *Retreat Planning Team*



Every fall, women of our congregation (and beyond) look forward to gathering at Camp Mokule'ia for a weekend of renewal and connection in a place full of God's beauty in creation!

This year those plans had to be adjusted, yet even a global pandemic didn't manage to squelch the spirit of those who planned an appropriate way for the retreat to go on in a "socially distanced" way!

We divided the Retreat into two parts. Retreat - Part ONE was an envelope mailed to registrants. It was filled with sand, beads and other inspiring and beachy items, not only to bring to mind the beauty of Mokule'ia, but to engage the recipient in a "virtual" retreat of creativity and art.

Retreat - Part TWO was a delightful evening together via ZOOM on November 6! It was truly a joy to see each other's smiling faces and to have the opportunity to converse and share from our hearts. As women of faith, we were strengthened and encouraged by being together, by singing and laughing and praying together (in English and Pohnpeian)! Pastor Liz from Christ Church in Kailua gifted us with poetry and contemplation, Pastor Mary led us in communion. Our combined generous hearts reached out with an offering to the UCC Transitional House, a place of safety for sisters experiencing unrest in the home. Though we all affirmed that, next year, we would love to meet again at the beach, we celebrated the beauty of this year's Sisters, Sand and Spirit!

Don't Miss These Scholarship Opportunities!

Application deadline: February 28, 2021

By: Lisha Moffat, *Women's League*

The Women's League is once again pleased to offer 2 scholarship opportunities to assist those in attending (or planning to attend) higher education programs. Previous awards ranged from \$1000 to \$2000* and prior recipients may reapply each year.

The **KENNETH O. and DORIS A. REWICK EDUCATIONAL AID FUND** is awarded to students from Hawaii enrolled (or will be enrolled) in any accredited school for undergraduate or graduate college training, or for other specialized training beyond high school and includes full time, part time or online students.

The **RUTH C. SCUDDER SCHOLARSHIP** is awarded to a female of Christian affiliation from Hawaii who is a student within the University of Hawaii system. Preference is given to UCC members and upperclassmen.

Applications will be accepted through the **ScholarsApp** online platform beginning **December 7, 2020**. Visit <https://scholarsapp.com/> to create an account and for additional information. Please e-mail cucwlscholarship@gmail.com with any questions. Deadline for complete applications is **February 28, 2021**.

**Award amounts may vary from year to year and are per the discretion of the Women's League.*

THANKS IN GIVING

By: Veronique Braithwaite, Preschool Director

Central Union Church Preschool collaborated with CUC during the month of November by collecting non-perishable food items to add to the food supply that is being distributed through the Serving Aloha efforts. Preschool families donated items that were placed in boxes that the keiki decorated themselves! Children learned the importance of sharing and helping those in need.



The Preschool also celebrated its annual Fall Fitness event! Children and teachers had an opportunity have fun and get fit for the day through activities such as hip-hop dancing, obstacle course workout and yoga stretching! The event is the Preschool Parent Teacher Organization's (PTO) main fundraising event for the year.

Report from Our World Mission Ministry

By: Margie Smith, *World Mission Ministry*

“Could we Help Kiribati?” That was the question a member, Keith Bettinger, posed to me at Aloha Lanai. He works for USAID and the UN and said that Kiribati (pronounced Kir-a-bis) is one of the poorest countries in the world.

Kiribati is a country of three island groups — the Gilberts, the Phoenix and the Line islands. It is positioned so it is in all four hemispheres — North, South, East and West. Except for Banaba (600+ feet) all the islands are atolls. Its population of 100,000 people are beset with rising seas and ever more powerful storms.

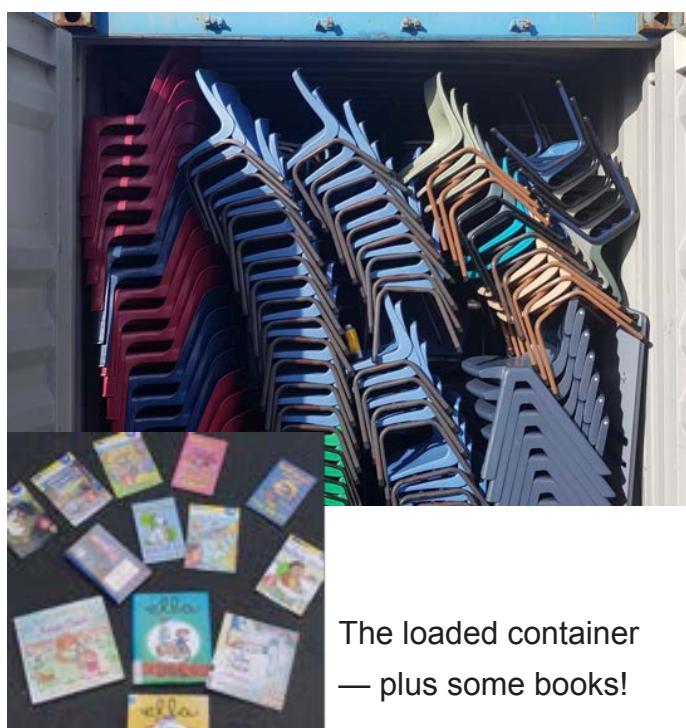


How could we help? As we talked we found out that the teacher on Banaba needed school furniture for his students. A search on Amazon showed school desks and chairs costing over \$100 — they don't deliver to Kiribati. But Keith found out that New Zealand regularly gives



away used school furniture. Free! desks and chairs!

But how were we to get them from Auckland to Banaba? And how much would it cost?



After months of investigating, Keith learned that Latter Day Saints Charities regularly sends cargo

around the Pacific, and agreed to share a shipping container with us to deliver the desks from Auckland (1) to Tarawa (2), where they will then be transshipped onto one of the copra boats that services Banaba (3).

The government is encouraging people to move to the one high island, Banaba. So the furniture will be greatly used. As to the cost? We are standing behind the highest estimate (\$4,000) and hoping for less.

The loaded container — plus some books!



Kokua Food Drive

for our Kupuna and others in need

**Sunday, Dec. 6
From 2-3:30pm
at Central Union Church**

Enter the drive-through via Beretania Street
to dropoff your donations at curbside.

The Kokua Food Drive is made possible by the generosity of
many, and the Angel Food Network of Help Is On The Way,
in partnership with Central Union Church.

**Non-perishable
and toiletries
only, such as:**

- Canned goods
- Rice and pasta
- Cereal
- Dried fruits
- Juices & snacks
- Low sodium and
vegetarian groceries
- Soap & shampoo
- Toilet paper
- Toothbrush & toothpaste

Web: hihelpisontheway.org

Email: hihelpisontheway@gmail.com

Phone: (406)-426-1013

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 facebook.com/hihelpisontheway

Celebrate Christmas with Central Union Church

~ *In an ever-changing world, the Christmas story is steadfast.* ~

Christmas Eve December 24, 2020

5:30 PM* & 8:30 PM – Drive-In Candlelight Service

Enjoy worship with the Christmas story and carols, sung from the comfort of your car as we broadcast through your radio. Bring your own candles or flashlights.
*A Family-Friendly Service!

7:00 PM & 10:00 PM – In-Person Candlelight Lessons & Carols

Registration required. Candlelight service in the sanctuary with live music and the Christmas story.

Celebrate with us!



8:30 PM – On-Line Christmas Eve Service

An on-line worship service accessible at centralunionchurch.org or on Facebook at Central Union Church of Honolulu. Enjoy the service at 8:30 PM or any time after.

6:00 PM – In-Person Central Union Windward Christmas Eve Service

Share in the Christmas story and carols on the Windward side at 38 Kaneohe Bay Drive.

11:00 AM – On-Line Pohnpeian Christmas Day Service

Find us on Facebook at CUC-Pohnpei-Ministry.

Central Union Church (since 1887)

"We Engage and Embrace ALL as we seek to Embody Christ!"
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Photo credit: Rebecca Woodland