

## **A Litany for the Bicentennial of the Hawai'i Conference United Church of Christ**

In Deuteronomy 26:1-11, on the eve of entering the Promise Land and entering a new era of life, Moses instructed the Hebrew people that they should praise the God of pilgrimage who brought them safe thus far with offerings and confession of the journey of their ancestors. As we the Hawai'i Conference United Church of Christ pause to observe the bicentennial of the arrival of the first Congregational missionaries and look forward to how God is still engaging us today let us offer praise to the God who arranged for the Gospel of Christ to find a welcoming population on the Hawaiian Islands.

Let us remember that the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM) formed in 1810 in response to a desire to meet the spiritual needs of those living outside the United States by preaching the gospel to those without knowledge of God through Jesus Christ;

**Bring to our awareness O God, the works of your hands.**

Let us recall Henry 'Ōpūkaha'ia and his Hawaiian friends, Thomas Hopu, William Kanui, John Honoli'i, and George 'Humehume' were among the first students at the Foreign Mission School in Cornwall, Connecticut in 1817, attending with the goal of serving the native country;

**Bring to our awareness O God, the works of your hands.**

Let us remember that 'Ōpūkaha'ia, wanting to spread the word of Christianity back home in Hawai'i, wrote a book about his experiences and his vision to bring Christianity back to his home. That the presence of the Hawaiians in Connecticut awakened a deep Christian sympathy in the New England churches, and the death of Henry 'Ōpūkaha'ia in 1818 spurred the ABCFM to send missionaries to Hawai'i;

**Bring to our awareness O God, the works of your hands.**

Let us remember that Hiram Bingham and his Andover Theological Seminary classmate, Asa Thurston, were the first to respond to a call to accompany the four Hawaiian natives back to Hawai'i "to teach the truths of salvation", and were ordained at Goshen, Connecticut, on September 29, 1819. That the ordination was followed by the formation of Missionary Church at Park Street on October 15, 1819, and the first Pioneer Company headed to Hawai'i departed from Boston Harbor on the ship *Thaddeus* on October 23, 1819;

**Bring to our awareness O God, the works of your hands.**

The first Pioneer Company included two ordained preachers, two ordained missionaries (Bingham and his wife Sybil and Thurston and his wife Lucy); two teachers, (Samuel Whitney and his wife Mercy and Samuel Ruggles and his wife Mary); a Doctor (Thomas Holman and his wife Lucia); a Printer (Elisha Loomis and his wife Maria); a Farmer (Daniel Chamberlain, his wife and five children) and also included among the passengers the four Hawaiian natives: Thomas Hopu, William Kanui, John Honoli'i, and George Prince 'Humehume' (son of Kauai's King Kaumuali'i);

**We thank you, O God, for those who responded to your call.**

After an arduous and perilous journey of more than five months, the *Thaddeus* arrived at Kawaihae Harbor on April 1, 1820, and received permission to land at Kailua-Kona on April 4, 1820. Having already decided to adopt Christianity as the new faith expression of the Hawaiian people, King Liholiho gave permission on April 11, 1820 for the missionaries to stay and set up their first mission station, Mokuaikaia Church, on the island of Hawai‘i and afterwards the *Thaddeus* sailed for Honolulu on April 12, 1820, and the missionaries set up the Honolulu mission station on April 19, 1820, establishing Kawaiaha‘o Church on April 20, 1820;

**We thank you, O God, for those who responded to your call.**

Let us remember that the Hawaiian *ali‘i* and missionaries worked together with true virtue, mutual respect, and with *kokua aku, kokua mai* (“to help one another, to cooperate”). That the missionaries established the first high school, Lahainaluna, in 1831 in Lahaina, Maui, to train young men in order that they might become assistant teachers of religion to their own people, to disseminate sound knowledge, and "to qualify native school teachers for their respective duties; to teach them, theoretically and practically, the best methods of communicating instruction to others”;

**We thank you, O God, for those who responded to your call.**

Let us recall the collaboration between the missionaries Bingham, Thurston, Richards, and Bishop and the Hawaiian scholars, poets, and orators including Governor Hoapili of Maui, Governor Kuakini of Hawai‘i, Kelou Kamakeu, Ioane Papa I‘i, and David Malo allowed for the entire Bible to be translated from the original languages and printed in the Hawaiian language in 1839 and called the *Baibala Hemolele*;

**We thank you, O God, for those who responded to your call.**

Let us remember that Hawai‘i was officially a Christian nation by 1840, its then constitution stating, “That no law shall be enacted which is at variance with the word of the Lord Jehovah, or at variance with the general spirit of His word.” And that in 1863 the ABCFM ended its support to the missionaries in Hawaii, believing it had completed the mission to bring the gospel to the Hawaiian people; its missionaries were to turn the ministry over to the local pastors and not stand in their way;

**May we continue to respond to the still speaking God.**

Let us recall that the Hawaiian Association of Ministers and Churches formed in 1823, changed its name to the Hawaiian Evangelical Association (HEA) in 1853 and, in 1959 when Hawai‘i became a state, the HEA voted to join the United Church of Christ and is now known as the Hawai‘i Conference United Church of Christ (HCUCC) with 14,591 members in 116 churches;

**May we continue to respond to the still speaking God.**

Let us also remember that in 1893, in 1893, a group that included descendants of the original missionaries and certain ministers of the Hawaiian Evangelical Association conducted an illegal overthrow of the Kingdom of Hawai'i and one hundred years later the President of the United Church of Christ, Rev. Dr. Paul Sherry, formally apologized to the people of Hawai'i for the complicity of HEA leaders and the UCC, along with the Hawai'i Conference United Church of Christ, donated significant funds toward redressing this wrong.

**May we continue to respond to the still speaking God.**

Let us recall that we the Hawai'i Conference United Church of Christ are one '*ohana* bound by God's work in history to a legacy of faith and trauma. Let us gather at this time of Bicentennial observance as seekers, not for self-gain but for healing, not to ignore history but for a way of responding to all caught up in the legacy of our past.

**May we continue to respond to the still speaking God.**

Let us remember that many people found their way to the Hawai'i islands and brought faith and spiritual sensitivity with them and now the Hawai'i Conference is composed of a grand diversity of cultures and peoples seeking common ministry.

**May God forgive our shortcomings, show us how to be reconciled one to another, so that as we are sent forth by the Spirit, we may walk humbly in Christ's footsteps pursuing peace, justice, and the renewal of creation. Amen.**