

The Friend

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Ho'olehua Congregational Church on Moloka'i (circa 1960s). This Year They Celebrate 100 Years of Faithful Ministry



A Faith Journey: From the Village to the City, From the Mainland to the Island

REY DESENGANIO, PASTOR, MOANALUA COMMUNITY CHURCH

"I was poorly born on the top of the mountain."

This line from a Filipino folk song is an apt description of where I'm from: a mountain village, 60 kilometers south of Manila, called *Alulod*, which means "gutter." So, I literally came from the gutter.

My surname used to be spelled **"Disingano,"** which is Spanish for "disappointed". But who would want to be Mrs. Disappointed? So in high school my siblings and I eventually tweaked our family name to **"Desenganio."**

Growing up I was a dreamer—a daydreamer, to be exact. Many afternoons, I'd find myself perched on top of a tall tree, and looking northward I'd wonder "what lies beyond the distant horizon."

In 1973, at age 17, the horizon opened up for me. I became a foreign exchange student which allowed me to go through senior high school while living with a host family in Blue Earth, Minnesota. The experience was life changing. I caught the Protestant religion. I was baptized, and soon felt *"the Lord needs me,"* the same way I guess Jesus *"needed a donkey to enter the city."*

Returning to the Philippines, I enrolled in a Bible school—to my parents' great disappointment. They thought I should "amount to something" instead of becoming a "dirt-poor preacher." Five years later, however, they were among those who I baptized in a river.

Feeling inadequate doing ministry with a Bible school diploma, I went to college for two years and immediately enrolled at Union Theological Semi-

nary. Those were dangerous times. The Philippines was going through the dark night of Martial Law. Unlike my braver classmates, I became an "armchair revolutionary."

In 1984 I received my degree, a Bachelor of Theology, with my eyes fixed on doing ministry in the city. I did not want my kids to grow up in the province like I did.

Ministry in the city was kind to me. I landed the choice assignments—local congregations with "English pulpits." Still, I was wishing my family would also experience living in the USA.

In 1996, my wish came true when I accepted the invitation to serve as pastor of a small Filipino congregation in Fremont, California. My family and I went through

the normal pains of adjusting to a new environment. But overall, the experience was rewarding and wonderful.

Three local churches and 25 years later, however, "my shelf-life" hit its expiration date. Honest friends said I had become *"sweet and slow"* and needed to be *"put out to the pasture."*

The pasture providentially turned out for me to be a green pasture—a *destination assignment*—a small Filipino congregation in Honolulu. Needless to say, my wife and I love most everything Hawai'i: the weather, the food, its slow pace, and the love we feel from our Church 'ohana.

Lately I realized the difference between being 17 years young and 71 years old. At 17 I was looking

towards the future, while at 71 I am mostly staring at my rear-view mirror, romanticizing the past.

I also realized that my "three scores and ten" are gone, and I'm living my "bonus years" in a place where rainbows and golden sunsets abound—a twin reminder of the "hope that springs eternal," and that a good day's work deserves a glorious ending.

Furthermore, looking back I realized that "God's call to the ministry" leaves room for personal dreams and penchants included. In the ministry I've seen places and met people who have enriched my life. God has granted me most of "my heart's desires," including enjoying golf in Hawai'i, year-round.

The road of the ministry has taken me from the mountain to the city, across the ocean, from the Mainland and full-circle to the Island. Not bad I guess for a daydreamer with a bad name, whom the *Lord picked from the gutter.*



God is still speaking

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The views expressed belong to the authors and do not necessarily represent the Hawai'i Conference.

Waiola: Living Water, Then, Now, and Tomorrow!

ANELA ROSA, KAHU, WAIOLA CHURCH

Living in a historical town such as Lahaina provides many ways to honor those who have come before us. Today we feel the fortunate benefits of modern-ness with social media, electronics, texting, Facetime, and the ability to take pictures with your phone. Never would we have ever thought this would be a possibility 20 years ago or more. We can capture moments in a split second and share it in the next. This is one way to seize the sentiments of your current experience. When we think of the past and those who have walked on the same grounds and campus we are currently walking, you wonder how they captured those moments and experiences when the tools (as we know and use today) were not easily available to document that time, place, or person.

In that time, they used what they had available. Thus, while wandering through the graveyard at Waiola you are greeted with an array of historical writings which are provided for you

on headstones reflecting 203 years of documented lives. A tapestry of woven and intricate names of all nationalities and ages exists with many stories tied to just reading and imagining the lives and the time they lived. The very same names reflect the different levels of social tiers from a time and age when it may have made a difference when you were living. We discover on this walk, in death and burial, witnessing these names, they have all become one of the same with no exception of who they were before their death.

A tour of the campus in itself speaks volumes of this very same history that shaped our community then and continues to do so even today. In so many ways it has also shaped our church and the legacy of members who have walked the grounds. Just to face and turn to this place of resting, you feel the mana (power) of the kauhane (spirit) that is settled in a very loving way. The strength to live today, the love that feeds us to holomua (move us

forward), the wholeness of it all has given us the years of survival during challenging moments of health and physical property damage.

The church has experienced immeasurable loss. Yet the very same loss and experience have never prevented the faith and beliefs of what has been taught and shared over the many generations from being stronger and continuing over the years. It is because of this same faith, we, all of us (kākou), benefit from the gifts shared in the Aloha of being loved in a community of trust from our own sister churches as well as all denominations. It involves the entire Lahaina community. We can function today because of our past, because of how we live, and how we will continue in this practical way of being filled with the same Kauhane that continues to guide and protect us in so many ways.

Three years ago, the fourth church raised on the campus of Wainee took its last breath. It doesn't mean we stop all that we do. What it means is we take the next breath and holomua. Pick up the pieces, pick up the pace, pick up the spirit and the faith and move. We become movers and shakers in this modern world. Our church history has shown us the resilience of what is possible and without blinking an eye, the church community stepped in to help us take that new breath, the living breath, to become the living water, Waiola.

Waiola speaks volumes on its own. Waiola is never alone; Ke Akua has given us many gifts over the past 203 years of giving and sharing. Our kuleana today is to continue with the giving and sharing to all who come as all are invited. Our past is our kahua and from this kahua, we live today and with the same kahua, we share with tomorrow.



Waiola Church



All of Our Relations

JONATHAN ROACH, ASSOCIATE CONFERENCE MINISTER

I am disappointed to share that the Roach family coat of arms doesn't feature birds; rather, my family's symbol features three fish. Those three fish remind me that for generations we were fishermen but more importantly, they also remind me that we were and are followers of Christ Jesus. For thousands of years, the fish has been a symbol of Christianity and that is why those three fish (think trinity here) are on our coat of arms.

The Roaches were an Anglo-Norman family. The name comes from the Old French word "*roche*," which means "rock." And this fits with our family motto: "*Mon Dieu est ma roche*" (My God is my rock).

My branch of the family (from old Viking stock) followed William the Conqueror from Normandy to England in 1066 and in the 12th century followed Strongbow to Ireland, where we became famous or notorious (depending upon your point of view) for working to throw out colonial powers.



My branch of the family ended up in North America, where in 1710 William Henry Littleberry Roach was born in the colony of Virginia. And our family genealogy and our genetic family tree show that we have always been explorers and pilgrims with various branches of the family tracing back to the Middle East, Asia, Africa, Europe, and all four directions.

Sometimes our DNA helps support the family stories, including that we are descended from people held in slavery who were originally from the Yoruba people in Nigeria and the Luhya people in Kenya. And sometimes it has left us with more questions like: Where did that DNA from the northern Han people of China come from? Or where did the genetic heritage from the indigenous people of modern-day Peru come from?

Today, to all this history and stories, I add my own experiences. I grew up a white lower-middle class preacher's kid in the Midwest whose college advisor told me that I was graduate school material but not ready for grad school until I got my a%\$ kicked by life.

So, I got my professional start teaching eighth grade writing on the edge of the Navajo Nation and had my whole world paradigm deconstructed (for the better) in a couple of months and where I experienced my call to the ministry on Arizona Highway 191 near Canyon de Shay in 1997.

Then as I was finishing my seminary journey, I married the Rev.

Jihey Chung in her hometown of Seoul, South Korea where a new family member informed me that I was the first non-Korean in the Chung family in 3,000 years. Jihey brings her own family symbol, the golden turtle, of the Yeonil Jung clan from the bongwan of

Pohang, North Gyeongsang Province whose family genealogy go back to the founders of the Silla Kingdom, which was founded about 50 years before the birth of Jesus. And together we are raising an incredible daughter, who brings her own great genetic heritage.



Yeonil Jung clan seal

Today we live in the ahupua'a of Kea'au, the muku of Puna, on the mokupuni of Moku o Keawe, and in a couple of months, I will have lived on this 'aina longer than I have lived anywhere. I hope to spend the rest of my life here and leave these two acres, which it is my kuleana to care for, better by nourishing the land, building up the soil, planting good plants, addressing the trauma it has endured, empowering the manu to flourish, getting rid of invasive species, and leaving this land beautiful and thriving for the next generation. I pray this for my ministry too!

These are some of the complexities of all the relations that I bring to being your Associate Conference Minister...to this beautiful and difficult ministry. I look back at all my relations so I can move forward. I ka wā ma mua, ka wā ma hope and *Mon Dieu est ma roche*.



Steeplejacking Revisited: Protecting a Church's Covenant with the United Church of Christ

ANDREW BUNN, HCF EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

This year *The Friend* has invited us to return to the piko: the center, the point of origin, the genealogy of faith that binds a congregation to those who came before and those still to come. There is a hard corollary. A church can be severed from its piko. When a congregation is taken out of the United Church of Christ, what is lost is not only a name on a sign. The cord is cut in both directions, back to the kūpuna who gave the land, raised the walls, and kept the church through lean generations, as well as forward to the descendants who were meant to inherit it.

Five years ago these pages carried an article on steeplejacking, the pattern in which a group from outside a denomination gains control of a mainline congregation and then removes it, with its property, from that denomination.¹ The scenario is a familiar one that has been experienced in a surprising number of Hawai'i Conference churches and former churches over the years, and typically follows a pattern. A pastor without standing in the UCC is called. New members arrive with no history or interest in the church's congregational traditions and historic connections. The bylaws are amended, a little at a time, until authority rests with a small, appointed board or just the pastor. Longtime members become a minority in their own church. The congregation then withdraws, and the sanctuary, the cemetery, and the land go with it. All with due process, but with profound sadness among the longtime members.

This pattern has not gone away. What has changed is that the tools



PHOTO CREDIT: SHUTTERSTOCK

for resisting it are better understood. Three points are worth carrying into a council meeting this year.

The early signals are ordinary ones. They are not dramatic. A church stops sending delegates to the Association meeting. The annual report goes unfiled for a second or third year. A pastor is called who holds no ministerial standing in the UCC and shows no interest in obtaining it. Support for Our Church's Wider Mission quietly ends. Each is a small administrative lapse on its own. Together they describe a church drifting from its center, and that drift is what makes a takeover possible.

Bylaw protection works, but only if it is drafted with care. A provision requiring a supermajority vote to withdraw from the UCC is standard advice, and it is good advice, but the denominator decides everything. Under section 414D-112, Hawai'i Revised Statutes, the default is a majority of those present and voting.

Two-thirds of the members present at a sparsely attended

meeting can be a very small number of people. Two-thirds of all active members is a different matter entirely. Councils should also consider requiring two meetings held months apart with real advance notice and require the full text circulated with a rule that only members of a year's standing may vote on a question of affiliation.

Bylaws are not the only instrument, and they are not the strongest. Bylaws adopted one day can be amended on another. Gifts of land, property, and funds may be made on the condition that they be used only so long as the church maintains its standing in the UCC, and those conditions hold. Section 414D-188 permits a church's charter to require that certain amendments be approved in writing by a named third party, a provision that by statute cannot itself be amended without that party's consent. And title to church property may be conveyed to a trustee to be held for the benefit of the congregation so long as it remains in the UCC. The Hawai'i Conference Foundation holds title in trust for many local churches for precisely this reason.

None of this reflects distrust of a congregation's judgment, nor is it intended to cast a negative light upon the tradition of local church autonomy, which embodies the right to disaffiliate. It is about ensuring that

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¹ See "Steeplejacking: Taking Churches Away from Our Denomination," *The Friend*, October 2021, pp. 5–6.

FORMER MISSION STATIONS AROUND THE ISLANDS



Kihamaniania Church and School Mission was built in 1840 on Lana'i by the Lahaina missionary station



The mother church building of today's Puka'ana Congregational Church was built in 1858 and still stands on the coast.



The front door now covered in a bayan tree of Eleio Church (Kukuihaele Congregational Church) was built in 1860 and originally was an 'apana of 'Imiola.



The old belfry of Ka'ahumanu Church built in 1842.



Mokuaikaua Church was established in 1820 and the current sanctuary was built around 1837. It is the oldest Christian Church in Hawai'i.



This original mission station was built in 1837 for 'Imiola Congregational Church where Lorenzo Lyons pastored for 53 years.



Kalua'aha Congregational Church, the mother church on Moloka'i, was established in 1832.



The Wai'oli Mission Hall was built in 1841, restored in 1921, and is still in use today.

My Tūtūs and Me

EDIE KAPIKO, KEAWALA'I CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH

("Tūtū" is short for "Tūtūwahine," "grandmother," or "Tūtūkāne," "grandfather")

By the time I got to know my Tūtūs they were well into their fifties and their seven children were all grown with their own families, so it was just the two of them living up in Maunawili Valley, in the Kailua district.

By the time I was 8 or 9 years old, I was old enough to spend summers with them; we all took turns since there were a lot of grandchildren. I was old enough to take care of myself and run wild with my cousins who lived close by.

My Tūtūwahine was kind and loving but she was not a "hands-on" tūtū; when you stayed with her, she fed you breakfast then you were on your own. She grew gardenias which she sold at the old garden and fruit stand that was located on the highway going into Kailua and also sold made-to-order ginger and puakenikenis leis. I still remember seeing her out in her ginger patch early in the morning picking her flowers before the sun came out.

My most memorable times with my tūtūs were on the one Sunday a month (Communion Sunday) when they would take us (my sister and me) to church with them.

It was special because we had to drive over the old pali road. It was a winding and twisting road that was built into the mountain with areas where you could pull over and

stop to cool off the car's radiator because it would overheat going up and over the mountain. When the radiator had cooled enough Tūtūkāne would then fill it with water and the journey would continue until we reached the top of the road, which is the Nu'uanu Pali Lookout.

From Nu'uanu we proceeded to Kalihi to Ka Makua Mau Loa Church which is the Hawaiian church that we attended.

The service was all in Hawaiian and although I did not understand what was said I do remember listening to my tūtūwahine singing the hymns in her beautiful, clear voice. She sang them with such heartfelt love and warmth; they were like prayers. I especially remember the communion hymn *Ka Haku Aloha E*.

Well, as life would have it, I grew up, graduated from high school, then nursing school, married, and life got busy with work and raising a family; church got put on the back burner.

Fast forward to 1991, by this time I am well into my forties, into my second marriage and living in Makawao, Maui. Life was good BUT...something was missing from my life: CHURCH AND

JESUS. So, the search was on.

I went to several churches in the area, but they were not what I was looking for. As divine intervention would have it, a friend invited me to his church in Makena. He told me, "Edie come to Keawala'i, we have a new Hawaiian pastor, and I think you will like him. His name is Kahu Alika."

Well, I found Keawala'i and Kahu Alika who invited me to come to the next service. I remember attending a couple of services before attending my first communion service.

I will never forget what happened when I heard *Ka Haku Aloha E* that Sunday. I was instantly transported back to the church in Kalihi, sitting next to my tūtū and listening to her sing that hymn in her beautiful, clear voice. I sat frozen in my seat at Keawala'i; I could not sing, my throat tightened up and THE TEARS came flowing like the river Jordan. There was no stopping it.

It took a long time before I could sing that hymn without crying but after some 30 years plus at Keawala'i Church, I now sing it without crying knowing that my Tūtūwahine was the spark that led me back to Jesus and I am eternally grateful.



Kahu Kealahou Alika



Keawala'i Congregational Church

YZ [pronounced “wise”] literature is wisdom from the young, Generations Y and Z to be more specific. See how young people are shining, witnessing, and reflecting light.

What Inspires You?

What inspires your work and ministry with youth in our churches, drawing from your experience growing up in the HCUCC?



“To steward the gift that is a faith community is why I’ve been involved in the formation of the youth in the Hawai’i Conference. I found my way in the world through the formative events of my own youth. Participating in wider United Church of Christ (UCC) camps and events was a true rite of passage for me. The teachings of Jesus, alongside lasting memories of community, kindness, and good fun, have stuck with me ever since.

Recently at a wider UCC event, most conversations with those in the retired demographic looked back fondly on their involvement in youth ministry and especially the camps. And part of our motivation across the generations is the same: we want today’s young people to have those same life-changing opportunities. It is incredibly rewarding to equip youth through active involvement and help them build connections so they can draw from these meaningful experiences. This is about more than just putting on events; it is the continuation of creating a supportive, faith-filled community.”

Danielle White, Hilo Coast United Church of Christ



“As I ponder about what inspires my work/ministry with youth in our churches, one of the big reasons was because I see myself in some of the kids and youth. I see excitement, nervousness, joy, and eagerness to meet, connect and fellowship with the other youth from the Hawai’i Conference UCC wider church. I can’t help but remember the many positive experiences, friendships and memories I also had while attending my one and only Hawai’i Conference UCC youth event on O’ahu while I was in the eighth grade back in 2008. And now I serve as a chaperone and member of the planning committee of the annual ‘Aha Makua youth event. It’s amazing to see how all the youth from other Hawai’i



Conference UCC churches on the other islands come together each year to fellowship, bond, and grow in their personal spiritual walk with God. From singing or harmonizing worship songs to praise God, playing funny group bonding games that bring laughs and the inner-most enthusiastic spirit of others, and playing pickup basketball or volleyball with others, to enjoying a nice cool dip in the ocean which connects all of us, our beautiful islands and church ‘ohana. As we continue the legacy of our ancestors who came before us, may we also serve faithfully our purpose in God’s most magnificent plan. To God be all the glory forever and ever. Amen.”

**Nate Timoteo,
Bethel of
Amazing Grace
Church/Peteli o
le Alofa Tunoa**



To learn more and see more from youth and young adults, or to submit content for consideration for future pages in *The Friend*, visit our webpage at hcucc.org/yz-literature.

... Steeplejacking Revisited: Protecting a Church's Covenant with the United Church of Christ, continued from page 5

a decision of this magnitude is made deliberately, by the whole membership, rather than by whoever happens to be in the room. A church that has

taken these steps has done more than protect an asset. It has secured its piko for the generations that follow. Churches with questions about

these matters are encouraged to contact the Hawai'i Conference Foundation and to consult their own legal counsel.

A New Peace Pole on Kaua'i

ALAN AKANA, KAHU, KŌLOA UNION CHURCH

Kōloa Union Church dedicated a new peace pole on Sunday, August 2, placed just outside the main sanctuary doors. The words "May Peace Prevail on Earth" are written on the pole in four languages: English, Hawaiian, Japanese and Ilocano (a common Filipino dialect on Kaua'i). These four languages were spoken by the Protestant churches in Kōloa when Kōloa Union Church was established in 1923. The morning worship service on August 2 focused on world peace, including Scripture, music, message and prayers. Alan Akana spoke of the importance of imagining peace and then committing to peace within individual lives, communities, and nations. The service concluded with spoken



prayers for peace by the Congregation.

Terry Liu was a guest speaker and musician during the service. He has been active in the World Peace Project since the mid 1980's. During that time he helped representatives from the World Peace Prayer Society from Japan and California place a peace pole in the Pentagon. He has studied the writings of the philosopher and spiritual teacher, Masahisa Goi (1916-1980), who was an atomic bomb survivor and at the age of

33 initiated the practice of people praying "May Peace Prevail on Earth." Liu earned degrees in violin performance from Baldwin-Wallace College Conservatory of Music, an M.A. in ethnomusicology from University of Hawai'i at Mānoa, and a Ph.D. in ethnomusicology from Kent State University.

The service can be viewed on YouTube at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RfuALK195rQ&t=1s>.

Mission Offering: The Christmas Fund

Support the Christmas Fund Offering

Gifts to the annual Christmas Fund special mission offering embody the spirit of the season by supporting those in need who have faithfully served the church.

Formerly known as the Veterans of the Cross offering, the fund is administered by the UCC Pension Boards and provides direct financial assistance to retired and active United Church of Christ authorized ministers, lay employees, and their surviving spouses, including pension and health premium supplementation, emergency assistance, and Christmas gift checks to hundreds of annuitants.



UNITED CHURCH
OF CHRIST

The Christmas Fund for Veterans of the Cross and the Emergency Fund is one of four UCC special mission offerings. The recommended date to receive this offering is Sunday, December 20, but local churches are encouraged to pick an Advent or Christmas date that works best for them.

Conference News and Highlights

Go to www.hcucc.org to learn more about these and many more stories from around the Conference.

Pastoral Transitions



James Breckenridge has been called to serve as the intentional interim minister with Waialua United Church of Christ on

O'ahu. He started on August 1.

Richard Hotchkin began his ministry as the intentional interim minister with Makiki Christian Church in Honolulu on August 1.



Laura Robinson has concluded her ministry with Church of the Crossroads in Honolulu. Her last Sunday was August 2.



Jacob Poindexter has been called by Church of the Crossroads to serve as their designated term minister. His first Sunday was August 9.



Jiale Caleb Sun has concluded his ministry with First Chinese Church of Christ in Hawai'i. His last Sunday was

August 16.

Irene Willis Hassan has concluded her ministry with Kailua Christian Church. Her last Sunday was August 30. She has been called to a new ministry with Central Union Church and will begin there on September 16.



Church Anniversary

This August, **Ho'olehua Congregational Church** celebrated 100 years of faithful ministry on the island of Moloka'i. On Thursday, August 20, the church hosted a Founders Aina Ahiahi Dinner honoring founding family members of the church and on Sunday, August 23, a special anniversary worship service was held.

Conference Calendar of Events

AUGUST 31 - SEPTEMBER 2

Pastoral Leaders Retreat, Camp Mokulē'ia, O'ahu

SEPTEMBER 7

Labor Day (Office closed)

SEPTEMBER 12

Conference Council Meeting

SEPTEMBER 19 - 20

Micronesian Council UCC Meeting; HCUCC hosting

SEPTEMBER 26

HCF BOD Meeting

OCTOBER 1, 2026 - JANUARY 1, 2027

Jonathan Roach on sabbatical

OCTOBER 12

Indigenous Peoples' Day (Office closed)

OCTOBER 23 - 24

AHEC Fall Hālāwai, Kawaiaha'o Church

OCTOBER 24

SCHCC Board Meeting

NOVEMBER 1

Kaua'i Association 'Aha Mokupuni

NOVEMBER 7

HIA 'Aha Mokupuni

Thanks to our friends, *The Friend* is free of charge to anyone who requests it. We offer our sincere mahalo to those who have generously given a monetary gift to help defray publication costs. A gift of \$15 will pay for one person's subscription for one year. Gifts may be sent to the Hawai'i Conference UCC, 700 Bishop Street, Suite 825, Honolulu, HI, 96813.

September 2026

LALA RELIEF APPEAL

Lala Relief Appeal

When disaster strikes our island communities we show up for one another. In the wake of Hurricane Lala, our folks are already doing exactly that: cooking meals, gathering supplies, sitting with families in their grief, and helping neighbors take their first steps toward rebuilding. The Hawai'i Conference United Church of Christ invites all of us to join in this shared effort through a Lala Relief appeal.

This appeal isn't just about one community. It's about every person who has been shaken, displaced, or left uncertain about what comes next. We want to make sure no neighbor feels alone and no household goes without support. Every gift designated for Lala Relief will go directly toward response and recovery as we help families find stability, help communities regain their footing, and help our churches continue the compassionate work they've already begun.



If, after the immediate relief phase, any portion of these funds remains, they will strengthen the HCUCC General Disaster Fund to help prepare for future emergencies and ensure that we can respond quickly and faithfully whenever the next need arises. You may contribute by sending checks to the office made out to the Hawai'i Conference UCC with "Lala Relief" on the memo line.

You can also give online via www.hcucc.org and the "Hawai'i Disaster Relief Fund" donation button.

Your support truly matters. It brings comfort, restores hope, and reminds people that their community is standing with them. Mahalo for caring so deeply, for giving generously, and for helping our islands heal with one act of love at a time.