

**Sharing Culture:
A Design for the Hawai'i Conference United Church of Christ
to Engage Our Micronesian Partners**

David K. Popham, Conference Minister

Historical and Regional Relationships

The relationship between the Hawaiian Islands and the Micronesian Islands and atolls is defined by historical missionary engagement and Pacific Islander identification.

Early Congregational work in Micronesia was accomplished by missionaries sent from Hawai'i with material support from the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Mission as well as The Women's Board of Missions for the Pacific Islands (an affiliate first of the Hawaiian Evangelical Association and then its successor the Hawai'i Conference UCC).

Furthermore, we are related by our shared identity as Pacific Islanders residing in Oceania honoring a common experience as island dwellers and facing similar concerns for the preservation of Pacific island cultures, the development of sustainable habitats, and the pressures of climate change.

Sharing Culture

Whenever possible the Hawai'i Conference, United Church of Christ will share culture with the Micronesian Council United Church of Christ family inviting MCUCC congregations to worship and celebrate the presence of God in ways which honor the culture of their home islands and mother churches. The Hawai'i Conference will be open to language, worship patterns, pastor staffing, and family structures which while possibly different from our own understandings honors the ways and traditions of the mother churches.

The MCUCC will share Hawaii and US culture as is needed to prove an honorable neighbor. While the goal is to celebrate what is distinct about being Chuukese, Pohnpeian, Kosraean, and Marshallese it should be acknowledged that certain Hawaii and US cultural expectations also need to be honored if churches and congregations are to be a light for Christ in the Hawaiian context.

Ecumenical Partnership

The relationship between the Hawai'i Conference, MCUCC congregations, and the Global Ministries of the national United Church of Christ (USA) and the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) is best characterized as an ecumenical partnership which shares both historical mission ties as mentioned above and present-day migration patterns. Currently, the historical relationship with the mother churches on the home islands is predominantly a concern of Global Ministries while the migration patterns to Hawaii is the predominate concern of the Hawai'i Conference. There is overlap of these concerns

and the partners lay no claim to specific areas of ministry while understanding that Global Ministries is the lead UCC (USA) entity for partnerships on the Micronesian islands and atolls and the Hawai'i Conference the lead partner with MCUCC congregations on the Hawaiian Islands.

Ecumenical partnering implies a shared interest in ministry and mission around the common goal of wellbeing for all partners involved. In the shared culture of the Hawaiian context the wellbeing of the MCUCC congregations as well as respect for Hawaiian church leaders (female and LGBTQ included) and respect for Hawaii State laws provides the foundation from which strong ecumenical partnering can take place.

Commitments of the Hawai'i Conference

1. The Hawai'i Conference will make a focus on Micronesian Congregations a priority
 - a. Hawai'i Conference Office will:
 - i. Coordinate on Micronesian ministry in Hawaii and with the leaders of the mother churches as needed.
 - ii. Work with Hawai'i Conference Associations and the Micronesian Committee to coordinate efforts in Micronesian congregation support.
 - iii. Identify Micronesian congregations and leadership in Hawaii.
 - iv. Work to establish Micronesian congregations as "churches" by Hawai'i State law.
 - v. Interface with Hawai'i Conference Associations Committee on Ministry and local congregations about Micronesian culture.
 - vi. Help to sustain relationships with the mother churches and to provide educational opportunities to learn of Hawaii and US culture.
 - vii. Provide for minister and lay ministry training as requested by the Micronesian leadership or the Hawai'i Conference Associations.
 - viii. Be available to Micronesian congregations to interface with the police or other aspects of the Hawaiian legal system as may benefit the congregation.
 - ix. Work with Micronesian congregations to identify suitable buildings for worship.
 - x. Work with Micronesian congregations to obtain affordable liability insurance.

2. Establish a line item in the Hawai'i Conference budget for partnership dues to the MCUCC
3. Work with Global Ministries as ecumenical partners in the MCUCC
4. The Hawai'i Conference will not intentionally invite a Micronesian congregation to separate from its mother church.
 - a. In cases where separation occurs the Hawai'i Conference encourages the local congregation to resolve the issue within itself by examining the pros and cons of separating from the mother church within the context of their respective cultures.
 - b. Micronesian congregations in this circumstance should resolve this issue sooner rather than later so there might be a clear understanding of whether the mother church or the Hawai'i Conference has oversight support responsibility.
5. As long as a Micronesian congregation is in relationship with the mother church, the guiding polity of the congregation will be that of the mother church in all things, including the selection of pastors and lay leadership.
6. In the case where the congregation is in full communion with the Hawai'i Conference then the guiding polity will be that of the UCC (USA) in all things including the selection of pastors and lay leadership.
7. In the case where the congregation has dual standing with both the mother church and the Hawai'i Conference, the local congregation will need to discern how and to what measure the polity of both judicatories are applied within the congregation.
8. Hawai'i Conference staff visiting Micronesia will seek to communicate the visit to the appropriate MCUCC leader out ahead of time.

Requests of MCUCC congregations in Hawaii

1. To share with the members of Micronesian churches the US cultural emphasis on supervised childcare so that children at church are always supervised by an adult 21 years or older to minimize both legal liability and property damage. Here is a point where cultural perspectives diverge and a sustained conversation about children and childcare needs to be established.
2. To share with the ministers and leaders of Micronesian churches the Hawaiian cultural emphasis on honoring theological diversity.

- a. Sharing culture, the Hawai'i Conference recognizes the right of the mother churches to vet new ministers per their understandings of faithfulness to biblical precepts.
 - b. The Hawai'i Conference request that in mutual sharing of culture that the Micronesian clergy and lay leadership recognize the UCC (USA) also vets ministers per our understanding of biblical principles. It is our expectation that HCUCC congregations which call female and/or LGBTQ clergy will be treated with respect by Micronesian congregations nested within their facilities.
 - c. In rental situations in which respect and the sharing of culture cannot be achieved those Micronesian congregations will be asked to find other locations for worship.
3. Micronesian congregations will constitute themselves as legally recognized houses of worship in the state of Hawaii by filing all appropriate paperwork with the state in a timely manner.
 4. Micronesian congregations will secure appropriate insurance (with guidance from the Hawai'i Conference when necessary).
 5. Micronesian congregations will participate fully in the life of the Hawai'i Conference and its associations including meetings, educational and self-care opportunities, youth ministries, and Our Churches Wider Mission denominational support.

There is much to be gained when joining in mutual support of one another. As ecumenical partners sharing cultures, we can work toward the common ministry God has placed before us so the light of the gospel may be lifted and draw hurting and lost souls to Christ, our Savior.

NOTE:

Following the Micronesian Council United Church of Christ meeting in August 2022 the following clarifications can be added to HCUCC ministry with Micronesian congregations:

1. It is up to the local Micronesian congregation to discern if they would like a formal relationship with the HCUCC.
2. The Conference Office will work only with those congregations in formal relationship with the HCUCC.
3. Formal relationship is defined as having church standing or seeking church standing with one of the HCUCC Associations.

4. Pastoral standing is secondary to church standing and does not apply in the definition of formal relations. I.e. the church may join the HCUCC without the minister having dual standing with an Association.
5. When a church seeks to join the HCUCC, the Conference Office will pursue communications with the Micronesian mother church to confirm knowledge and blessing of the relationship.
6. When seeking formal standing with the HCUCC, the culture of the HCUCC is primary for establishing what legally constitutes a “church.” However, in governance and worship the mother island culture is primary.