

ON COMMEMORATING THE 200TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE ARRIVAL OF CHRISTIANITY IN THE HAWAIIAN ISLANDS AND CELEBRATING THE ONGOING RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST AND THE HAWAIIAN HOST CULTURE.

Submitted by the Hawai'i Conference United Church of Christ

Summary

The purpose of this resolution is to recognize the significance of the ministry undertaken by the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM) in 1820 to bring the gospel to the then Sandwich Islands in response to both the biblical call to minister to the people of these islands and the vision of a young Hawaiian, Henry 'Ōpūkaha'ia, and his friends, to bring Christianity to their home country. These first missionaries not only shared the good news, they also ministered among the people and became deeply involved in the life of the native Hawaiians. The missionaries helped to develop a written form of the Hawaiian language, established a school to train additional teachers of religion, and published the Bible in the Hawaiian language.

This resolution also recognizes the partnership of the host people and the royalty (*ali'i*) of the Kingdom of Hawai'i who determined that Christianity would be the new religion of their people and supported the missionaries' endeavors. Due to the backing of the host people, the missionaries experienced a deep resonance between the gospel of the kingdom of heaven and the spirit of *aloha* that existed in the islands and continues to this day.

Biblical, Theological and Ethical Rationale

In Deuteronomy 26: 1-11, on the eve of entering the Promised 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. It is with such a confession of the journey of our ancestors that we offer praise to the God who arranged for the Gospel of Christ to find a welcoming population in the Hawaiian Islands.

Text of the Motion

WHEREAS, the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM), formed in 1810, arose out of a desire to meet the spiritual need of those living outside of the United States by preaching the gospel in the "heathen" world¹;

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

WHEREAS, 'Ōpūkaha'ia, wanting to share 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;

WHEREAS, the presence of the Hawaiians awakened a deep Christian sympathy in the New England churches, and moved the ABCFM to establish a mission at the Islands;

¹ The term 'heathen' was used at the time to mean without the knowledge of Jesus Christ and God.

WHEREAS, the book by 'Ōpūkaha'ia inspired missionaries to volunteer to fulfill his vision to take the gospel to the Hawaiian Islands, and upon his death in 1818, the ABCFM was spurred to send missionaries to Hawai'i;

WHEREAS, 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;

WHEREAS, the ordination was followed by the formation of Missionary Church at Park Street Church on October 15, 1819, and the first Pioneer Company departed from Boston Harbor on the ship *Thaddeus* on October 23, 1819, headed to Hawai'i;

WHEREAS, the first Pioneer Company included two ordained preachers, two ordained missionaries (Bingham and his wife Sybil [née Moseley] and Thurston and his wife Lucy [née Goodale]); two teachers, (Samuel Whitney and his wife Mercy [née Partridge] and Samuel Ruggles and his wife Nancy [née Wells]); a Doctor (Thomas Holman and his wife Lucia [née Ruggles]); a Printer (Elisha Loomis and his wife Maria Theresa [née Sartwell]); a Farmer (Daniel Chamberlain, his wife Jerusha [née Burnap] and five children) and also included among the passengers the four Hawaiian natives: Thomas Hopu, William Kanui, John Honoli'i, and George Prince 'Humehume' Kaumuali'i (son of Kaua'i's King Kaumuali'i);

WHEREAS, 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;

WHEREAS, 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;

WHEREAS, the Hawaiians were inspired by the sincerity and religious fervor of the missionaries; and

WHEREAS the Hawaiian *alii* and missionaries worked together with true virtue, mutual respect, and with *kokua aku, kokua mai* ("to help one another, to cooperate");

WHEREAS, 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";

WHEREAS, in 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, the entire Bible was translated from the original languages and printed in the Hawaiian language in 1839 and called the *Baibala Hemolele*;

WHEREAS, 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. All laws of the Islands shall be in consistency with the general spirit of God's law";

WHEREAS, in 1863 the ABCFM ended its support to the missionaries in Hawai'i, 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;

WHEREAS, the Hawaiian Association of Ministers and Churches was 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 churches²;

WHEREAS, 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; and

WHEREAS, the indigenous population of Hawai'i still suffers the historic trauma of colonialism;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the United Church of Christ Board encourages all settings of the United Church of Christ to recognize and commemorate the 200th anniversary of the arrival of Christianity in the Hawaiian Islands; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the United Church of Christ Board encourages all settings of the United Church of Christ to engage in intentional discussion of the continuing impact of colonial era attitudes and American Christian prejudice towards native populations; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the National Setting of the United Church of Christ, through the UCC's missions and ministries, remain committed with both human and capital resources so that trained persons might continue to emulate the first ABCFM missionaries' zeal for spreading the good news of God's love through Jesus Christ.

² United Church of Christ 2018 Yearbook and Directory