

## Kosraeans Travel Home for Christmas

Kosrae is home to the “Island of the Sleeping Lady,” but on Christmas Day, no one sleeps.

Every few years, Kosraeans worldwide make a pilgrimage to their home island for an extravagant Christmas celebration. The reunion—once every four years, but now every five—will take place this December.



*Marchers from Pohnpei participated in the 2007 Kosrae Christmas celebration (photo by Dana Lee Ling).*

“In Kosrae, Christmas is the most important day of your life each year,” said Elwell Taulung, Pastor of Kosrae Honolulu Congregational Church. “This year, I would say eighty percent of all Kosraeans will fly home no matter where they are living.”

Kosrae’s population of less than 7,000 is almost exclusively Christian. Nearly the entire island gathers for Christmas at a different Protestant church each year, with celebrations starting early and running nonstop until almost midnight.

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## New Venue, New Schedule Are in Store at Leaders Event

The annual Church Leaders Event of the Hawai‘i Conference will be held at Central Union Church on February 25, 2017. Held for years at Nu‘uanu Congregational Church, this popular day-long event will move to Central Union this year to take advantage of the church’s historical archives.

Central Union Church archivist and historian Rosemary Eberhardt, who led well-received tours at last year’s ‘Aha Pae‘aina, will lead a workshop showcasing the church’s History Room, Archives and Reading Room.

“We will exhibit our resources, explain the reason for preservation, and regale examples of stories on how requests for information develop,” Rosemary said. “These stories are wonderful vignettes of history.”



*Eric Anderson, Pastor of Church of the Holy Cross, will be a presenter at the Church Leaders Event.*

A change in the schedule this year means more time for plenaries, workshops and fellowship. Delivering one of two plenary keynote addresses will be Eric Anderson, Pastor of Church of the Holy Cross in Hilo, talking about church communications. A second plenary will feature the Church Building and Loan Fund (CB&LF), a financial ministry of the United Church of Christ that assists new and renewing congregations with the purchase, construction or renovation of church buildings and facilities. CB&LF is also a sponsor of the Church Leaders Event.

Another schedule change means that attendees will have the opportunity to participate in three workshops instead of two. The diversity of topics promises to provide something of interest to moderators, treasurers, committee chairs, youth leaders and other church leaders.

One workshop, “New Beginnings,” will introduce the New Beginnings Assessment Service developed by the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), and will be led by UCC national staffer Chris Davies. The assessment helps churches answer the question, “What is God calling your congregation to do and be in this time and this place?”

Two workshops will cover communications: “Communications and the Local Church,” led by Eric Anderson; and “Effective

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## The Voice of One

by Charles C. Buck, Conference Minister

*The voice of one crying out in the wilderness: Prepare the way of the Lord, make the Lord's paths straight (Matthew 3:3).*

This scripture passage from Isaiah is often read in worship this time of year. The gospel writers invoke it to introduce that quirky, insistent and oddly-dressed prophet, John the Baptist.



I have always liked this passage because it suggests that John, whom I picture as a lone, solitary figure standing in a vast expanse of wilderness, communicates a powerful message that is heard by many. His is the voice of one that is audible above the din of crowds. He exemplifies the power of one to make a difference. And that is how I have typically interpreted this passage.

Until recently.

Like many, I was surprised by the results of the presidential election. Then I was equally surprised by the protests that erupted in many cities around the U.S., including Honolulu. What surprised me were the protests against the outcome of the election ("Not my President!"). For that, I held little sympathy. Regardless of where we stand in support of Donald Trump, we simply take it as axiomatic that in a democratic republic, we accept and then live with the outcome of free elections—and wait for the next election.

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*In Jesus, we see that God's way is to turn fully to the voice of one.*

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But as I watched and listened more closely, there was something more: people were protesting the ugly and nasty rhetoric that spewed forth from the mouths and Twitter feeds of the president-elect, his staff and his supporters throughout the presidential campaign. It was a protest for human rights and dignity, especially for women, black lives, Muslims, the LGBTQ community, immigrants and migrants, and others who were ridiculed, threatened or assaulted by verbal, and even occasionally physical, attacks. These were protests against bigotry and hate, and demonstrations of love and support for the rights and liberties of all people.

These protests made me realize that there is another side to John's voice of one crying out in the wilderness. This is

the voice of one crying out—and no one around to hear, or willing to pay heed to, these cries. This is the voice of the poor, the disabled, the migrant, the abused, the hungry child, the homeless family, the jobless ex-convict—and all those to whom the world turns a deaf ear, blind eye and cold heart. For these forgotten and forsaken, there is no power of one to make any difference in their lives.

But John's voice cries out something entirely different: "Prepare the way of the Lord. Make the Lord's paths straight." And in Jesus, we see that God's way is to turn fully to the voice of one—like that of the blind man by the side of the road, or the woman who bled for years and touched his cloak, or the paralyzed man who had no way to Jesus except through the roof, and so many more for whom Jesus stopped what he was doing and offered the fullness of God's love and grace.

This way of attending to the "least of these" (Matthew 25:40) is what I want to believe I was hearing in the cries of protestors (at least among the peaceful ones) following the election. It's the way of mutual love and respect, genuine concern for neighbor and stranger, and earnest striving for peace and justice.

The United Church of Christ Board recently adopted for the denomination a mission statement: "United in Spirit and inspired by God's grace, we welcome all, love all, and seek justice for all." These few words capture the very essence of God's call to the church in every age—and especially for us in the present time where intolerance and bigotry threaten to drown out the voice of one.

## Clergy Discuss Pastoral Care in Diverse Religious Settings

The diversity of religious and spiritual practices in Hawai'i has shaped local culture and individual identities. How to do pastoral care in this complex setting will be the topic of the annual clergy retreat, hosted by the Hawai'i Island Association, taking place March 6-8 (Monday to Wednesday), 2017, at the Courtyard King Kamehameha's Kona Beach Hotel in Kailua-Kona. The retreat is open to all clergy. Full information and registration will be sent out early in the new year.



God is still speaking

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## Youth and Young Adults Fill Samoan Churches

While many churches today long for full Sunday school classes and youth groups, youth and young adult participation in Samoan churches is thriving to overflowing.

"There is no magic to keeping our youth in church," said Iese Tuuao, Pastor of Samoan Church of Hawai'i LMS in Nanakuli. "It is woven into the fabric of their families and lives. Christianity is who we are, and we require our youth to be in church."



Youth attend church at Samoan Church of Hawai'i LMS in Nanakuli.

Iese explained that Samoan culture is bound up in family values, which in turn are inextricably linked to church. That identity and structure continue strong today.

One hundred percent of youth and young adults at Samoan Church of Hawai'i LMS participate in the life of the church. Opportunities abound for youth involvement including fundraisers, sports, choir, dance, community outreach projects, theatrical productions, Sunday school and a Women's Ministry that teaches girls to bond with their mothers and become righteous women.

Iese's daughter, Gloria Tuuao, 26, has attended church all her life. She said that Christianity is not just something talked about or practiced at Samoan churches, but lived out daily.

"As Samoans, we believe that being Christian is essential for our lives," she said. "We put God first in all that we do. Faith is embedded in our homes, and I believe that is why more Samoan children are involved in church."

In other words, Gloria said, youth participation in Samoan churches boils down to parents. "If parents can make sure their kids go to school and do their homework, why can't they make sure they attend church?" she asked rhetorically.

As important as requiring youth to attend church may be, Iese believes that active participation of parents is imperative. If parents require children to attend Sunday school but fail to attend adult education classes, for example, it sends a mixed message about the value of church.

"If youth see their parents participating in church, I am really sure they will have no doubts," Iese said. "Those kids will stay and also be involved. It starts with the family."

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*(Kosraean Christmas, continued from page 1)*

Highlighted by traditional marching and singing of Kosraean Christmas hymns, the holiday festivities are one of a kind. Groups representing each of Kosrae's five villages, as well as groups from abroad on reunion years, don flamboyant garments while marching in unison to form letters such as "M" and "X" for "Merry Christmas." Goodies are tossed to spectators who overflow the sanctuary.

"Christmas in Kosrae reminds me of the Pro Bowl," said Elwell. "It is like a huge parade."

Preparing for Christmas reunions is no small feat. Airfare from Hawai'i costs up to \$2,000, and marching uniforms alone have cost Elwell's congregation \$10,000. Singing and marching rehearsals take up to several hours per night, six nights a week, and often commence months before Christmas.

On Hawai'i Island, the Kosraean congregation meeting at First United Protestant Church began fundraising in earnest in January. About fifty members sold food, raffle tickets and car washes to make the trip to Kosrae, where they plan to offer money to churches, donate food and toiletries to inmates, and hold short worship services at the jail and hospital.

"Some of our younger members have never been to Kosrae," said Hilo Pastor Nixon Jack. "We really want them to experience the Kosraean style Christmas so that when they grow old maybe they can carry on the tradition."

A deeply devout island, Kosrae observes the Sabbath seriously. Drinking alcohol on Sunday lands offenders in jail, and nearly everything, even the airport, shuts down. Because Christmas falls on Sunday this year, it will not be celebrated until Monday.

"Monday is the real Christmas this year," said Elwell. "Sunday will just be normal church."

As thousands of Kosraeans travel home for Christmas this year, they serve as a reminder of the true meaning of the season. In Kosrae, gift giving is modest and everything takes a back seat to God.

"Christmas is all about honoring Jesus Christ," Elwell said. "Our marching and singing and everything we do on Christmas is to represent that Jesus was born and to remind us of his life and resurrection."



Marchers from Tafunsak, the largest village on Kosrae, participated in the 2007 Christmas celebration (photo by Dana Lee Ling).





## 2016 Fall Youth Camp

Forty youth and eleven adults from around the islands gathered October 9-12 at Camp Mokule'ia on the North Shore of O'ahu for Fall Youth Camp. Led by Pu'a Foundation staff, Toni Bissen and Debbie Victor, youth discussed "Metamorphosis" through exercises such as sharing stories of their names, communities and gifts; writing mele or poems; and creating life maps for themselves. At the end of camp, youth reported that they loved meeting new people, learning more about their faith and God, and singing and sharing together.





**2016 Clergy Retreat**

The 2016 Clergy Retreat was held at Ala Moana Hotel on O'ahu from September 26 to 28. Keynote speaker was John Dorhauer, UCC General Minister and President, who led conversation on identifying new ways to "be church" in this day and age. He shared examples and stories of congregations that had identified ways to minister to their communities based on their unique gifts. Over fifty clergy from all the islands gathered for this time of renewal and inspiration.



## resource List

**Kalaupapa Sunday**

In January 1886, the first of more than eight thousand people diagnosed with Hansen's Disease were exiled to Moloka'i's remote Kalaupapa peninsula. On the fourth Sunday of every January, churches are invited to commemorate these patients on a day designated as Kalaupapa Sunday.

Borne out of a resolution at the 191st 'Aha Pae'aina, Kalaupapa Sunday is a time to remember and honor Kalaupapa's patients, many of whom came from or had connections to our families and churches. Resources for observing Kalaupapa Sunday are available on the Hawai'i Conference website ([www.hcucc.org](http://www.hcucc.org)).

The suggested date for observing Kalaupapa Sunday is January 22, 2017, though churches may honor the patients of Kalaupapa and their families any Sunday in the year.

**Henry 'Opukaha'ia Scholarship**

Each year the legacy of Henry 'Opukaha'ia, the young Hawaiian credited with inspiring the Sandwich Islands mission that brought Christianity to Hawai'i in the nineteenth century, lives on through scholarships awarded in his name.



Henry 'Opukaha'ia Scholarships are available to candidates for ministry attending an accredited seminary and clergy pursuing continuing education. This past year, four scholarships were awarded, including one for seminary studies, two for continuing education courses, and one for mission study in India.

Since 2004, ninety-nine recipients have been awarded a total of \$90,073. Forty-two have received seminary scholarships, and fifty-seven have attended continuing education workshops and clergy retreats with money received from this scholarship.

Churches are invited to receive the offering on the Sunday closest to the anniversary of Henry 'Opukaha'ia's death, which this year falls on February 19. Churches may also choose to collect on another date.

News briefs are adapted from *UCC News*, the online news portal for the United Church of Christ. For details on these and other stories, visit [www.ucc.org/news](http://www.ucc.org/news).

## Vision of a just world underscores clearer UCC purpose, mission

A vision of a just world for all people will guide and shape the future work of the United Church of Christ. It's a vision that John Dorhauer, UCC General Minister and President, and the unified Board of Directors are prepared to own as part of a refreshed set of Purpose, Mission and Vision statements.



The UCC purpose statement comes from the Gospel of Matthew: *To love God with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength and our neighbor as ourselves.*

Mission statement: *United in Spirit and inspired by God's grace, we welcome all, love all, and seek justice for all.*

And the vision: *United in Christ's*

*love, a just world for all.*

Board members overwhelmingly affirmed the statements during their fall business meeting held October 20-22.

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## General Synod 31 preparations underway

Organizers are preparing for the 31st General Synod of the United Church of Christ in Baltimore. A worship team



of four preachers has been selected and two theological reflectors have been invited to take the plenary stage to provide the spiritual components for the five-day gathering.

To help advance Synod business, the General Synod administration has put together a brief, explanatory video guide that outlines how to submit a resolution for consideration by Synod delegates (view it at [synod.uccpages.org](http://synod.uccpages.org)).

General Synod 31 will be held June 30 through July 4, 2017, at the Baltimore Convention Center, located in the heart of the city's historic Inner Harbor seaport. Registration will open on December 5. Information is available on the General Synod website at [synod.uccpages.org](http://synod.uccpages.org), which will be continuously updated.

## More than 500 clergy gather for prayer, solidarity and repentance at Standing Rock

A group of 524 clergy, spiritual leaders of 22 faith traditions called from all parts of the country, gathered in North Dakota for a day of solidarity and repentance on the Standing Rock Sioux Indian Reservation on Thursday, November 3.



(Photo by Rick Danielson)

They stood together in prayer along the Cannonball River to protect the water, the lifeblood of all living things. They also came together to combat racism and white privilege, broken

promises and forgotten treaties. As part of their pledge to fight the Dakota Access pipeline, several clergy repudiated the Doctrine of Discovery while gathered around the sacred fire at the Oceti Sakowin camp before representatives of the First Nations.

Over five hundred years ago, the Doctrine of Discovery guided the colonization of America and justified the killing and oppression of indigenous people by giving European explorers the right to claim non-Christian land and resources.

The Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL), a 3.8 billion dollar project to carry oil from North Dakota to Illinois, was redirected in the planning process. Designed originally to run closer to the city of Bismarck, it now traverses farms and fields near the Standing Rock Sioux Reservation, through sacred Native lands and potentially under the great Missouri River, the water supply for more than 17 million Americans.

As the pipeline construction inches closer to the river, the water protectors' demonstrations and prayer circles grow in size and intensity. President Barack Obama said recently the U.S. government is examining ways to reroute the DAPL and address the concern of Native Americans and would have something to say about that in the coming weeks.

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## Wisconsin Conference will host 2019 General Synod in Milwaukee

The United Church of Christ will get a taste of cheese, brats and beers during the 32nd General Synod in 2019. The Wisconsin Conference



UCC was enthusiastic in its invitation to Milwaukee, offering to host the denomination's biennial gathering, which the UCC Board of Directors unanimously accepted as part of its business during the fall meeting on October 20. It will mark the first time a General Synod will be held in America's Dairyland.



*(Samoan Youth, continued from page 3)*

While it is not unheard of for Samoan youth to rebel against mandatory church attendance, as was the case for Gloria, most often they ultimately feel deep gratitude for their Christian upbringing.

"If not for Christianity, I probably would have ended up in a gang, in jail or pregnant at an early age like some of my high school peers," said Gloria. "But because I was spiritually fed, I leaned on God when I was lost and His love prevailed."



*Samoan youth begin participating in church at a young age.*

For sixteen-year-old Hunter Timoteo, who also attends Samoan Church of Hawai'i LMS, being required to attend church and cultivating Christian faith helped save him after his mother passed away.

"I remember being at the hospital during her final hours," he recalled. "My grades fell at school and every day I would cry. But then my auntie said to always pray to God for guidance. In my darkest times, God stuck by my side and showed me that I am strong."

The 2016 UCC Statistical Profile notes that 19.4 percent of UCC churches offer youth programs. Iese believes it is important for congregations to create a youth-conducive environment, which is why, among other ministries, his church holds White Sundays for young people to deliver the sermon, conduct the choir and lead the service in full.

"The environment of our church is like a loving family," said Hunter. "We care for, learn from and respect one another. I feel loved and I can feel God's grace in church."

Asked whether he envisions youth participation in Samoan churches dwindling someday, Iese responded, "That is a concern for Samoan pastors, but I do not see an end to it. As long as we involve our young people in church, it will continue. And right now it is so strong."

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 \$10 will pay for one person's subscription for one year. Gifts may be sent to the Hawai'i Conference UCC, 1848 Nu'uano Ave., Honolulu, HI 96817.



## Highlights from the Website

Go to [www.hcucc.org](http://www.hcucc.org) to learn more about these and many more stories from around the Conference.

**David Blevins** was recognized as licensed minister of Imiola Congregational Church on October 8.

**Gloria Imamura** was installed as Associate Pastor of Makiki Christian Church on November 6.

## Merry Christmas from the staff of the Hawai'i Conference United Church of Christ and the Hawai'i Conference Foundation



*(Church Leaders Event, continued from page 1)*

Social Media for Churches," to be co-facilitated by Papa Makua Ken Makuakane and Conference staffer Scott Davis.

"Our Whole Lives Curriculum," co-led by Brandon Duran, Minister of Spiritual Formation at Central Union Church, and Sarah Jones, Associate Conference Minister, will preview the comprehensive sexuality curriculum for teenagers, young adults and adults.

Ellen Godbey Carson, attorney and member of Church of the Crossroads, will facilitate a workshop on running effective meetings. Also offered will be a "Safe Church Guidelines" workshop.

Separate workshops will also be offered specifically for treasurers and moderators, and local Insurance Board agent, David Takagi, will return to lead "Church Insurance."

Complete information about this year's event, including registration forms, will be sent to churches in December. Save the date now and plan to attend.



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December 2016

## ***Around the Conference***

### **Conference Calendar of Events**

December 10	AHEC Board of Directors
December 26	Christmas Holiday (Office Closed)
January 2	New Years Holiday (Office Closed)
January 16	Martin Luther King, Jr., Day (Office Closed)
January 18	Clergy Continuing Education
January 27	State Council of Hawaiian Congregational Churches Board
February 17-18	AHEC ʻAha Halawai
February 20	President's Day (Office Closed)
February 25	Church Leaders Event
March 6-8	Clergy Retreat

### **Top 10 Tips for Advent**

Make your Christmas preparations more enjoyable with these humorous tips suggested in *Things Not to Do During Advent: Top Ten List* by R. Leigh Spruill.

1. Do not wait until Christmas Eve to attend church.
2. Do not forget the less fortunate.
3. Do not expect the culture to follow your lead (by resisting the cultural message to "shop till we drop").
4. Do not go into additional debt.
5. Do not overdo gifts.
6. Do not overdo your schedule.
7. Do not try to be perfect for the holidays.
8. Do not forget your Bible.
9. Do not add to the frenzy (remain composed during last-minute shopping or decorating).
10. Do not forget your rituals (lighting candles, saying prayers, meditating on scripture, etc.).