

Youth Are Inspired, and Inspire, at National Gathering

Forty-two youth and fifteen adults from five of the Hawaiian islands traveled to the United Church of Christ's National Youth Event (NYE) in Florida at the Coronado Springs Resort at Walt Disney World (see photos on page 4). This was also the first NYE planned in partnership with the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), which sent over three hundred youth.

Over three thousand young people convened for four days of worship, workshops, service, and fun. Twice each day, attendees gathered in a cavernous hall to praise God in song and prayer and to hear from inspiring speakers, many of whom were youth doing amazing work on causes God had inspired them to address. Youth were challenged to live out the NYE theme "BELIEVE": We're inviting you to believe that God calls you to be leaders of faith and leaders of change—not tomorrow, not someday, not eventually, but today!"

Among the speakers at NYE were Sean Russell, whose "Stow It—Don't Throw It" project addresses disposal of fishing line in a way that is environmentally safe and clean; Michelle Higgins, a #BlackLivesMatter activist; Aidan Hornaday of Aidan Cares, an organization he founded to help promote and raise money for other nonprofits; Trisha Prabhu, whose "ReThink Words" smartphone application helps prevent cyberbullying; and Hadiqa Bashir, winner of the Muhammad Ali Humanitarian Award for working to end the practice of child marriage in her native country of Pakistan.



The youth from Hawai'i were energized and inspired by the speakers they heard, and in turn had the opportunity to inspire and "Spread a Little Aloha" at one morning worship service through dance and song. Youth from Pearl City Community Church performed two liturgical hulas, and all the youth sang "Spread a Little Aloha" and the Doxology in Hawaiian. Many who attended NYE from all over the country praised the youth for their poise and generous, loving spirit!

Youth ended their week with a full day at the Disney parks on Friday before catching very early morning flights the next day to get home in time for the start of school on Monday! As tired as they were, all agreed that months of planning, fundraising and coordinating were worth the experience of a lifetime.

Church Consultant Leads Conference Assessment

Following on a commitment at the last 'Aha Pae'aina to evaluate the mission and ministry of the Hawai'i Conference, the Conference Council approved the hiring of a consultant to lead an assessment process.

Alan Oliver of Sun Valley, Idaho, was selected for his long experience in church and consulting work. The Council's executive committee, which was authorized by the Council to make the final selection, chose Al, as he prefers to be called, for his extensive experience in leading planning studies and capital campaigns for fourteen different denominations around the U.S.



The assessment process, which will start in November and conclude in early March with a report to the Conference Council and Foundation Trustees, will involve personal interviews and focus group discussions throughout the islands. At the time of this writing, the exact schedule of interviews and focus groups was being determined, and announcements of times and locations for focus group meetings will be made during the month of October. All persons with interest throughout the Conference are encouraged to attend a focus group meeting that works for them.

Al Oliver is a Presbyterian Church (USA) minister and has over thirty years of pastoral and church consultation experience. For fifteen years, he was senior pastor of the Presbyterian Church of the Big Wood in Ketchum, Idaho. As a consultant, he directed planning studies for denominations and church associations, as well as mission organizations and seminaries. He holds a Bachelor of Arts in social work and psychology from the University of Washington, and earned the Master of Divinity from Fuller Theological Seminary.

The assessment will test case statements of missional initiatives from the Conference's four missional teams and the Hawai'i Conference Foundation. The case statements will be used to test views of the Conference's effectiveness in fulfilling its mission, as well as to bring out the desires and dreams that participants have for the Conference.

Interviews and focus groups will be conducted on two islands in November, and then two more islands in January 2017. In February, Al will prepare a report of his findings and present them to the Council in early March.

The Council's goal is to use the results from the assessment report to develop a strategic plan for the Conference and the Foundation. The hope is to present a proposal for a strategic plan for discussion and approval at the 'Aha Pae'aina, the Conference's annual meeting, in June 2017.