

HAWAII CONFERENCE
UNITED CHURCH
OF CHRIST

The Friend



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THEOLOGY OF CHURCH

ONE 'OHANA

UNIFIED • RADIANT • TRANSFORMING



Built on a Firm Foundation: 'Aha Pae'āina 2025

The 2025 'Aha Pae'āina was held Thursday, June 12 through Saturday, June 14, at Kapa'a First Hawaiian Church and Kapa'a United Church of Christ on Kaua'i. The 'Aha Youth Track welcomed 31 youth as they met at Waineke Cabins in Kōke'e before joining the group on Friday, June 13. The annual business meeting of the Hawai'i Conference was convened on Saturday, June 14.

All who were in attendance were blessed by an abundance of hospitality, love, welcome, helping hands, joy, creativity, talents, sharing, fun, natural beauty, singing, inspiration, 'ono food—all coordinated graciously by folks in the Kaua'i Association and especially by our host churches.

Highlights from the 'Aha Makua portion of the meeting include:

- Opening Worship on Thursday evening featured Phiwa Langeni, Associate Conference Minister for the Southern California Nevada Conference, delivering the keynote address.
- Four workshops, ranging from "Prayers for the Hawai'i Conference and the World" (Janice Ogoshi), to "Pū'a Foundation—Bringing to Life the Parable of the Talents" (Toni Bissen), to "Church Governance and the Future of Your Church" (Caroline Belsom), to "Transformational Yet Stable: Rethinking Effectiveness in Mainline Christianity" (Irene Willis Hassan).
- After spending two days at the Waineke Cabins in Kōke'e, the youth joined the plenary on Friday afternoon and added much enthusiasm, energy, and singing to the group.
- Churches on Kaua'i hosted a mākeke selling handcrafted items with the proceeds going to various mission projects of the respective churches.
- A visit from Richard Chun, 101 years young, who celebrated the 75th anniversary of his ordination!
- Thanks to our churches on Kaua'i, attendees enjoyed a delicious dinner at Taste of Kaua'i on Friday night, which was followed by a rousing E Himene Kakou.
- The business session of the 'Aha Makua included the election of the nominees on the nomination slate as presented by the Conference Nominating Committee, the adoption of "A Resolution Calling the Hawai'i Conference United Church of Christ to Oppose the 2025 Immigration Rollbacks and Support Immigrants, Refugees, and Pacific Island Communities," and the approval of the budget for FYE 2025 – 2026 as presented.
- Two special offerings were collected during the 'Aha: \$1,061

was collected for Our Church's Wider Mission (OCWM) and \$1,018.01 was collected for the Vesper Maile Ito Fund.

It is so good to gather as family—renewing ties and welcoming new members into our 'ohana. Mahalo nui loa to all who attended, and especially to our host churches and sister churches on Kaua'i for their endless hospitality and aloha.



God is still speaking

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Photos from the 'Aha Pae'āina were taken by Kalani Wong, except where otherwise noted, and used by permission.

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The BRAID Church of Tomorrow

During the 203rd 'Aha Pae'aina at Kapa'a First Hawaiian and Kapa'a United Church of Christ on Kaua'i, Julie Buto and Jonathan Roach had the opportunity to interview Phiwa Langeni, who was our keynote speaker, about his theology of church. With this invitation Langeni started to explore his model of the BRAID Church of Tomorrow. He explained that BRAID is an acronym for **B**old, **R**elevant, **A**ccessible, **I**nnovative, and **D**iverse and each of these aspects need to be examined in terms of the past, present, and future of the church.

The BRAID Church of Tomorrow as Langeni envisions it:

experienced, that the bold Church of tomorrow will have to be **authentic**. How do we really lean more deeply into our authenticity?...How do we be bold in our authenticity, kind of building from vulnerability to move toward authenticity?"

• **Relevant:** "How do we keep people here?... What traditions make sense? How do we translate that for our 'now'?...It's not about going there to make new church members sit in your pews, but it's about the work that God has called

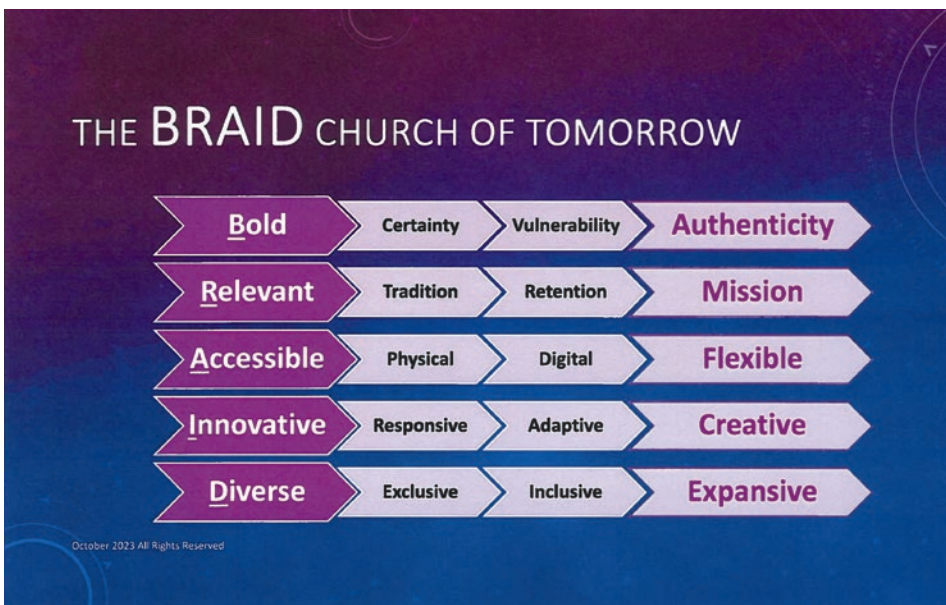


don't close because they ran out of people and money. They close because they ran out of relevance."

• **Accessible:** "The Church of yesterday was very physical, very neighborhood-based, parish-oriented, this church for this community. The church of now is a lot more digital... [as the church's reach] widens up [with the transition] from physical to digital, I would say the Church of tomorrow must be **flexible**....Being able to be flexible in that way to say, 'Hey, this isn't just for those who are within hearing distance in real time.' But the point is, being able to be flexible enough, not just for the people in your space, but how we might be able to nurture and care for those around it as well..."

• **Innovative:** "Before, I would say the church was more responsive. Churches had a need identified and then they had to think about how to meet that need. So the church, as it is today, is kind of in the space of being adaptive...I'm making the assertion that the church of tomorrow must be **creative**. As a theological truth, God creates humankind in God's image. God is Creator. How might they look as people who are creators with small 'c's'?...So the point is, what can we do creatively as a group? Now, I'll append that to say a lot of our clergy

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• **Bold:** He shares that "the bold church... of yesterday came in with a lot of certainty, these very clear proclamations—this is who God is, you accept Jesus in this particular way... And so we did these atrocious things. Because we know better, being able to be vulnerable to...some of our ugly histories in the past but still being able to have a bold witness to say, 'that was us, we didn't do well. Here's where we are now, we're aiming to do better.'...I'm making the assertion, based on what I've heard and

you to do...Churches that have been the ones that are feeling vital are the ones who actually went out to the community and they found a need; now all of a sudden, they've got community members who maybe are not church members, may never be church members, [but] who are interested in the same mission. Now all of a sudden, it's not the same five people doing the same thing in the church, but now it's these five people plus folk outside the church, partnering around this mission...Churches

The Beloved Body

DAVID K. POPHAM, CONFERENCE MINISTER

Any theology of the church must deal with how we conceptualize the church in the world. The Apostle Paul gave us our first written conceptualization for the church by comparing it to the human body. Just as each part of the body is distinct yet works together for the whole, so, too, does the church function under the headship of Christ (1 Cor. 12:12–14).



Curious about how this metaphor might be applied to the structure of the United Church of Christ with today's understanding of biology, I turned to Artificial Intelligence for a fresh perspective:

- The General Synod, like the mind, coordinates by sensing the needs of the whole body. Reflecting the UCC's emphasis on discernment and mutual respect, General Synod listens, observes, and suggests through various votes and resolutions.
- The Local Church is the heart of the UCC and beats in accordance with the community it serves. Not only do the heartbeats of the UCC originate out of the local community but they also set the rhythm for the flow of life through the system.
- The Associations and Conferences, like the nerves, carry messages between the Mind and

the Heart, not as enforcers, but as communicators. They are the connectors carrying the Spirit's whispers and the Body's cries. They help the parts speak to each other.

The Holy Spirit, like hormones, moves invisibly, guiding growth, healing, and unity. Unlike literal hormones, the Spirit is not bound by structure, yet moves through the structures bringing balance, conviction, and renewal (Microsoft, Copilot, June 26, 2025). We can also think of the various ministry settings of the UCC as organs. Each organ has its responsibility (autonomy) to function in the unique way as only that organ functions – the lungs cannot beat, nor the heart breathe. Yet at the same time each organ is accountable for the well-being of the whole (covenant) – when the lungs cease to breathe, the beating heart is affected.



Biologically speaking the processes and energies which keep us alive are called homeostasis – the stability of equilibrium or balance of all parts of the body. Without this stability the body cannot function or even continue living long. For some the words “stable” and “equilibrium” equate to “maintaining the status quo.” In reality, homeostasis is the dynamic process of being aware and

attentive of the balance among the various body parts in order to face any demand placed upon the body. For example, should you need to run from a fire, the bodily functions that might inhibit running are de-emphasized (thoughts narrow to a focus on safety) while those that enable running are emphasized (rapid heartbeat, adrenaline production). Once safety is reached then homeostasis will seek to establish a more balanced equilibrium among the body parts (heartbeat returns to normal, adrenaline production slows, thoughts broaden).

Our polity of autonomy, freedom of belief and practice, no hierarchical control, and covenantal relationships is born out of the theological commitments to freedom of the Spirit, the importance of communal discernment, and a balance between tradition and innovation. Like homeostasis, UCC polity allows for faithfulness to the Gospel and responsiveness to new realities.

In the wake of the pandemic and amid ongoing social transformation, polity understood as homeostasis takes on renewed significance. Just as the human body must adapt to illness, injury, and changing environments, so, too, the church must respond to new realities with resilience and grace. In this moment, the church is called not to return to a former equilibrium, but to cultivate a dynamic homeostasis—one that honors the unique gifts of each part while responding faithfully to the Spirit's movement in a world that is still healing, still changing, and still deeply in need of the dynamic living body of Christ.



The Church as a Good Corporate Citizen

ANDREW BUNN, HCF EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

All churches with standing in the Hawai'i Conference, and most church organizations generally, embody a dual identity: a spiritual community guided by God and a nonprofit corporation governed by secular law. Churches nurture faith, build community, and serve others, but churches also must be good corporate citizens. Here are five essential areas of "good corporate citizenship" to keep in mind.

Keep Your Corporate Registration Current. By incorporating in Hawai'i, churches as entities gain limited liability and perpetual existence. Yet incorporation is not a "set it and forget it" exercise. Each year, churches must file an annual report with the State updating its principal office address, registered agent, officer roster, and pay a nominal fee. Failure to meet this requirement risks involuntary administrative dissolution, which can cloud property titles, invalidate contracts, disrupt banking relationships, jeopardize insurance coverage, and generally create problems which may be expensive to fix. Churches should designate an officer to maintain a corporate-compliance calendar, oversee filings, and keep the official record book current.

Pay Your Taxes. Although churches are generally income-tax exempt, net earnings over \$1,000 from sources of income unrelated to church mission (such as a public coffee shop, secular retail, or event venue rental) must be reported on Form 990-T and taxed as unrelated business income tax ("UBIT"). All business activities also require a Hawai'i General Excise Tax ("GET") license with periodic returns, since

fundraising and facility-rental receipts are taxable (donations, seminary fees, religious-book sales, and school tuition remain exempt however). While primary worship spaces typically enjoy property-tax exemption, churches must still pay nominal minimum taxes on exempt parcels and full rates on areas or parcels used for non-exempt purposes (including vacant land). If a church has employees, it will need to pay payroll taxes and withholdings. Regular internal audits are recommended to help identify liabilities early.



Be a Good Steward of Your Property.

Owning and maintaining real estate (sanctuaries, fellowship halls, and parsonages) carries both practical and fiduciary responsibilities. Implementing a preventive-maintenance program, with scheduled inspections and timely repairs, preserves building integrity, extends asset lifespan, and avoids costly emergency interventions. Compliance with building codes, safety and accessibility standards, and environmental regulations (e.g., stormwater management) safeguards congregants and neighbors. Adequate insurance coverage, including "all-

risk" property, commercial general liability, and hired/non-owned auto insurance, protects both people and assets. Developing and testing emergency response plans for hazards (hurricanes, floods, wildfires) ensures swift, effective action in crises. Also, a well-kept property will be appreciated by your neighbors.

Manage Your Risk Proactively.

Churches must anticipate and mitigate a wide range of operational risks. "Safe-church" policies, with mandatory background checks and specialized training for anyone working with children or vulnerable adults, not only satisfy legal standards but foster a culture of protection and trust. A layered insurance program (general liability, errors & omissions, fidelity, and directors & officers' coverage) protects against claims from misconduct, abuse, theft, or governance errors. Robust data-privacy and cybersecurity measures (encrypted storage of member records, role-based access



controls, and a clear breach-response plan) safeguard sensitive information. Well-defined volunteer and contractor management practices, including written agreements that clarify roles, appropriate liability waivers, and consistent onsite supervision, ensure that every ministry activity proceeds smoothly, securely, and in alignment with both mission and compliance obligations.

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FRIENDS AROUND THE 203RD 'AHA PAE'ĀINA



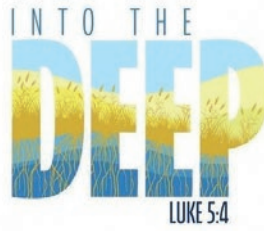


PHOTO BY KRISTEN YOUNG



HCUCC Delegates, Staff Headed to General Synod

The 35th General Synod of the United Church of Christ will be held in Kansas City, Missouri July 11 – 15, 2025, under the theme, “Into the Deep,” based on Luke 5:4. Delegates will vote on several important items of business, including:



- There are three proposed Prudential Resolutions and nine proposed Resolutions of Witness, including one from the Council for Racial and Ethnic Ministries (COREM) that is a companion resolution to one passed by delegates at the recent ‘Aha Pae‘āina on Kaua‘i.

- In light of the vote at the last General Synod in 2023 moving General Synod from a two-year cycle to a three-year one, proposed amendments to the UCC Constitution and Bylaws will be considered to align terms on the UCC Board, General Synod Nominating Committee, and United Church Funds Board of Directors with the new meeting cycle. Delegates will also vote on proposed changes toward a unified governance model.

The Hawai‘i Conference will be represented by 12 delegates, our Conference Minister David Popham, the Conference Council Chairperson Roberta Jahrling, along with several staff members and friends. A. Rushan Sinnaduray, Senior Minister of Central Union Church on O‘ahu, will be the Moderator of this General Synod. Meet our General Synod delegates:



• **Heather Barfield**
(General Synod Delegate Class of 2025); Kaumakapili Church, O‘ahu Association



• **Josann Jenks**
(2025); Kawaihae Church, AHEC



• **Robb Kojima**
(2025); Wailuku Union Church, ‘Aha O Nā Mokupuni O Maui, Moloka‘i, a me Lāna‘i

• **Cheri Dennis**
(2028); Lihue Christian Church, Kaua‘i Association



• **Taha‘a Kafele**
(2028); Hau‘oli Kamana‘o Church, AHEC



• **Frank Mulec**
(2028); ‘Opihika‘o Congregational Church, Hawai‘i Island Association



• **Marilyn Hasegawa**
(2028); Hanapēpē Hawaiian Congregational Church, Kaua‘i Association



• **Wryen Keoki Kiwaha** (2025); Puka‘ana Congregational Church; Hawai‘i Island Association



• **Nate Sugalu Timoteo** (2028); Bethel of Amazing Grace Church, O‘ahu Association

• **Preston Iha**
(2028); Nu‘uanu Congregational Church, O‘ahu Association



• **Jann Kojima**
(2025); Wailuku Union Church, ‘Aha O Nā Mokupuni O Maui, Moloka‘i, a me Lāna‘i



• **Danielle White**
(2025); Hilo Coast UCC, Hawai‘i Island Association





Youth Bring Enthusiasm, Joy to 'Aha Pae'āina

Thirty-one youth from Kaua'i, O'ahu, Lāna'i, Maui, and Hawai'i Island gathered for this year's 'Aha Youth Track. For many, it was their first time on Kaua'i. For some, it was their first time away from home. They spent two days in Kōke'e calling the Waineke Cabins home before heading down to Kapa'a to join the adults at the 'Aha Makua.

Youth made new friends, played games, worked with the Kōke'e Resource Conservation Program to remove invasive plants from the

forest, shared in songs and devotions, enjoyed nature, took a break from screens (no service or Wi-Fi at the cabins!), painted prayer rocks, wrote their own version of The Lord's Prayer, learned about our denomination the United Church of Christ... all these things helped to strengthen our foundation in Christ! This was a foundational experience for our youth and we thank everyone involved, including donors, for their support!

During our time together, I felt:
(words from youth)

- Safe
- Comfortable
- Included
- Happiness
- Excited to wake up every day



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.



- Like I found the perfect friends/families that I've been waiting to meet
- Warmth
- Thankfulness
- Welcomed
- Excited to wake up every day
- Comforted
- Joyful
- Blessed

"I learned that even if we are all different and from different churches, we all can bond together and have a great time with each other."

"I saw God when I was bored and someone played with me."

"I learned that God is our firm foundation."

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.

... The BRAID Church of Tomorrow, continued from page 3

are now kind of retiring sooner than they thought they would because of creativity burnout. So, I think that's something we really need to be mindful of, but like, creativity does not belong to just the leaders of the church. Sometimes our kids know better... Am I willing to give up my traditions so that they can be full, whole, authentic, and expressive and creative in a way that maybe is not what I'm used to doing?"

• **Diverse:** "Before [the church] was very exclusive; we're gathering around these things and that's it. The



church as it is now, and especially like the UCC with their 'God Is Still Speaking' campaign, it's very much about inclusivity, which has been great and that's how I found my way in. But the church of tomorrow must be **expansive**... that says, there's room enough for me, and there's room enough for you, and there's room enough for you, and there's room enough for you. We say we believe in this abundant God, but then we still keep limiting God to just what we know and how we know it.

To sum it up, the BRAID Church of tomorrow must be **bold** in its

authenticity, it's got to be **relevant** as it is mission-focused, it must be **accessible** in its flexibility, it's got to be **innovative** in its creativity, and it must be **diverse** as it's expansive enough to make room for all who desire to encounter God here."

As Langueni concludes, "if I were to leave something with you, it is to recognize that already, you are all doing the work of showing up anyway. Not just despite your differences, but *because* of your differences; that is, to me, the most full picture of God that I've ever seen."

Mission Offering: Neighbors in Need

Neighbors In Need (NIN) is a mission offering of the UCC that supports ministries of justice and compassion throughout the United States.

The Council for American Indian Ministry (CAIM), and its witness among indigenous churches and people receives one-third of the NIN funds. The remaining two-thirds of this offering is used by the UCC's Justice and Witness Ministries to support a variety of justice initiatives, advocacy efforts, and direct service projects through awarded grants to UCC organizations.

Grants ranging from \$1,000–\$10,000 are awarded

to UCC churches and organizations for projects that address one of the following areas: the rights and freedoms of all persons, environmental justice, economic justice, and/or whose work ranges from direct service to community organizing and advocacy to address systemic injustice.

The suggested date to receive the offering is **World Communion Sunday, October 5, 2025**, but churches may select another Sunday.

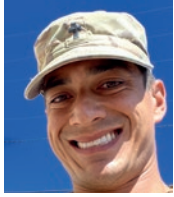
For more information and to apply for a grant, visit www.ucc.org/nin.

**NEIGHBORS
= NEED**

Conference News and Highlights

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

Pastoral Transitions



Vance Awa concluded his ministry with Wahiawa United Church of Christ as their Designated Term Minister on June 29.

Amy Butler has been called by Community Church of Honolulu to be their settled pastor. She began her new call on July 1.



In Memory

Donald McComber, 95, retired ordained clergy in the Hawai'i Island Association, passed away on May 6. He and his wife, Kahu Meilani, had moved to Kapolei on O'ahu a number of years ago, where they continued to reside. He is survived by his wife Meilani, his son Monte and daughter-in-law Helen, and numerous grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

Allan W. H. Lee, 89, retired ordained minister, passed away on May 27, 2025. He served various churches in our Conference including United Church of Christ – Judd Street, Central Union Church, and Community Church of Honolulu. He also served as president of the O'ahu Association and on the Conference's Board of Directors. This year he celebrated his 65th anniversary of his ordination. He is survived by his wife, Eloise, who worked in public school education for over 27 years. The family has requested privacy at this time.



Conference Calendar of Events

JULY 11 - 15

General Synod 35, Kansas City, Missouri

JULY 21 - AUGUST 21

David Popham on sabbatical

JULY 26

State Council of Hawaiian Congregational Churches Board of Directors

AUGUST 15

Statehood Day (Office Closed)

SEPTEMBER

Labor Day (Office Closed)

SEPTEMBER 8 - 10

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

SEPTEMBER 13

HCF BOD/Conference Council Meeting

... The Church as a Good Corporate Citizen, continued from page 5

Follow Good Governance

Standards. Effective governance aligns legal accountability with mission. Directors and officers must understand their fiduciary duties and uphold the duties of care, loyalty, and obedience. Church boards should have basic governance policies, including policies addressing conflict-of-interest and related-party transactions, whistleblower protections, document-retention schedules, an investment policy statement,

reserve and liquidity guidelines, reporting and transparency, executive and employee compensation standards, risk-management protocols, and board succession and orientation procedures, to name a few.

By adhering to these essential practices—accurate registration, tax compliance, responsible stewardship, proactive risk management, and strong governance—churches can be good corporate citizens while living out their spiritual mission.

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.

July 2025

MILESTONE ANNIVERSARY

Congratulations, Kahu Chun

DAVID K. POPHAM, CONFERENCE MINISTER

Rev. Richard Chun was honored at the recent 'Aha Pae'āina on the occasion of the 75th anniversary of his ordination at 101 years of age. Kahu Richard began his first solo pastorate in Hawai'i with the Lāna'i Union Church in the 1950's and was in ministry when the Hawai'i Evangelical Association voted to become the Hawai'i Conference, UCC. I had the pleasure of hosting Kahu Richard and his son, Jonathan, during the Taste of Kaua'i and came away from the conversation grateful for the insights and wisdom shared. Here are four things that stuck with me:

- The intuitions built around faith will change but faith itself remains: Kahu Richard shared how over his tenure in ministry the space for doing ministry and even the target of ministry shifted through the years. In retirement Kahu Richard and his wife taught English as a

Second Language around the world and discovered new avenues of touching people's lives.

- Ministry has legacy connections across the generations: Kahu Richard was warmly greeted and celebrated by Rev. Ben Sheets (current Lāna'i Union Church pastor) and the youth of Lāna'i who were participating in the 'Aha Youth Event. Kahu Ben shared how these youth were in some measure the fruit of the labor of Kahu Richard some seventy-five years earlier.
- Colleagues are a key to ministerial survival and enjoyment: Kahu Richard shared that during the early years of ministry he was encouraged to make stock investments but that he did not have the wherewithal to be an investor. However, he and two other colleagues decided to pool their funds and invest together. He



From left to right: David Popham, Richard Chun, Ben Sheets. Photo by Kalani Wong; used by permission

attributes his joy in ministry in part to these relationships.

- Family outlasts formal ministry: Kahu Richard repeatedly commented on his family and his late wife, Thelma, and the role they have had in his retirement and his ability to enjoy independent living while being interdependent on the family. Earlier when addressing the plenary, he paid special tribute to Thelma and thanked her for being his valued and beloved partner in life and in ministry for these many years.