

Wahine`aukai Mercado
Immerse Yourself
General Synod 2009 Report

I feel really blessed to have had the opportunity to attend the pre-Synod trip as well as Synod 2009. During the pre-Synod trip, I got to make new friends as well as see and visit different places that are important to the people of the United Church of Christ. While at the Synod in Michigan it was great to see all of my brothers and sisters from the United Church of Christ as well as learn about the many things that they are involved with. I feel so blessed to have had this experience and I want to do it again.

When first setting out on the journey, I was sort of afraid because I thought that I was not prepared for whatever it was that I would be required to do during the trip. I was also afraid of the people that I would meet, wondering if I would make friends. Therefore, I was praying before I left home and the whole way over to Honolulu for the Lord to guide me. When we got to Honolulu I liked the little game Kahu Dean Fujii had us do so that we could learn a little bit about each other. I remember most of it and it went like this: Alther likes to play basketball, Cody is 14, Kahu Dean was the old man on our trip, Wahine is a college student, Aunty Napua raises chickens, Tehani is class president, Belinda likes to hula, Aunty Marie is our nurse, Aunty Jeannie is trying to be a vegetarian, Kipa plays ukulele and other instruments, Tyler likes to watch TV, Kasey likes to play video games, Willis is a happy person, Uncle Ben also raises chicken, Aunty Diane's children are in Japan, and Aunty Dorothy she was the last one and I can't remember hers. It was helpful to get that little start on getting to know everyone. Then we were off on our journey.

Our first destination was South Dakota. It was inspiring to see the well known monuments. Mt Rushmore was awesome and what I liked the best is that I got a picture of our Hawaiian flag with Mt Rushmore. Visiting Crazy Horse was also very interesting because they are continuing the Native Americans culture by recognizing one of their notable and well known leaders in history. The Placerville UCC Camp where we stayed at that night was comfortable. The people were hospitable and the food was delicious, especially the carrot cake they made. It was very `ono. The next day we stayed at the Bridger Church on the reservation. It was fortunate that we got to visit with the Native

people of that land. We did sharing circles where we shared what was on our minds. We practiced archery shooting wooden animal targets with bows and arrows. We also did a thank you ceremony where Aunty Napua and I chanted and presented our host with makana from Hawaii which was a cultural exchange of aloha. The best part of that visit was the sweat lodge or inipi that we were invited to. I felt privileged to hear their stories while sitting by the fire, as well as the prayers that came from inside the sweat lodge as the ceremony went on. One of the things they shared that I remembered was that the North represents the Buffalo for food, shelter and warmth, the South for all the animals, the East for medicine and health, and the West for storms like thunder and lightening. It was interesting to learn that the different directions have significance in their culture which is similar to the Hawaiian culture in that each direction has a representation. Thank the Lord for all of his blessings that he showered down on us as we journeyed through our great land.

The Lord was always with us when we traveled to and through Chicago. Our Sunday in Chicago was remarkable. We were able to visit different places. My favorite place was Trinity Church. It was very different from the churches that I have visited in Hawaii. There were so many people there, but they were all so welcoming and caring to us. It was very uplifting and the spirit of the Lord was very strong there. We also got to visit Christ Church of Chicago and had a great lunch and visit there. The next day we visited different offices at Trinity and did another makana ceremony with oli. We got to try Chicago's famous dip dish pizza, it was so very `ono. During our time in Chicago, we got to visit Chicago Theological Seminary, it was such a beautiful place and it was surprising to find out that this was where my uncle Kahu Richard Kamanu attended seminary. The classes and Library looked like rooms from the Harry Potter movies. We also got to visit with Aunty Nani and helped to cook some local food for the pa`ina that they were having. We all had a blast.

While on our way from Chicago to Michigan, I got to ride my first train! It would have been way cooler (literally) if the air conditioner in our train worked, but thank the Lord that we made it to our destination safely. The Rockford church, where we stayed, was very welcoming. They fed us well and we had cots with air mattresses to sleep on,

it was luxury. Later, we got to go to Michigan Adventure Amusement Park, it was exciting. Then - - it was off we go to the Synod.

I've never been to a conference or gathering for church that had so many people. Once more, I was afraid. The first hearing that I went to was General Synod 101. There, they spoke about what the Synod was all about and answered some of the lingering questions I had. The next session that I went to was with my committee. That hearing, spoke about single Governance. That was a difficult hearing for me because I didn't understand what they were talking about most of the time. The plenary session was interesting. There was different business that they were talking about, even though I didn't understand it all it was an interesting and new experience for me. These meetings and session has helped me to see the inside of the business of our United Church of Christ Organization. There is so much more for me to learn!

The worship on Friday was tremendous. Reverend Otis Moss came and spoke. The songs and dancing that was done was different and not anything that I heard or experienced in church before so it was stimulating to hear and see something new. That night I found out what the "God is Still Speaking" was all about. Before going to the Synod I didn't know much about the workings of the United Church of Christ, or the main mana`o behind the "God is still speaking" saying. But when Reverend Moss was finished with his sermon I found out that only God can put a period when he is finished speaking, and God is Still Speaking!

On River City Saturday I went to Barbra Brown Taylor's presentation where she spoke about faith and narrative in the age of twitter. From that I understood how technology today is so advanced that you can get caught up in it. On that day we had rehearsal and prepared for our part in the Sunday service where we were going to dance. I enjoyed dancing and making friend with the others who were also dancing as well as our teachers. In the dance we got to put a little bit of hula choreography so that the Hawaiian culture was also included. That took a good amount of time but it was very enjoyable.

On Sunday I was not able to attend the sacred conversation on race personally because we had staging that morning but I was there in spirit. The vases that we were going to dancing with were in the room where the conversations on race gathering occurred and all of the information and prayers filled those vessels. Therefore as a dancer

I was responsible for the vessels and for placing the prayers and thoughts into the pool to be immersed. That was a great experience and I would definitely want to experience that again. That evening we had our first committee meeting. I really liked the whole getting to know each other and mini worship part before getting into the business.

My committee (a committee of four) was assigned Options to War against Iran, Axis of Friendship with Iran, and Solidarity with the People of Iran. There was a lot of discussion about each of the different issues. Through discussions, my committee had finally decided to join the three amendments into one.

Monday afternoon we started the voting and that was a huge experience within itself. I felt so overwhelmed because I wasn't completely versed on all of the amendments so I was somewhat confused. To be honest, although it was a privilege to vote I was sometimes unsure on what exactly they were voting on. I had to pray for clarity and God's guidance.

In between voting times I really liked the little pieces on the church's wider mission and also the commercials for the United Church of Christ. The one that I really enjoyed was the commercial with the kids doing "here is the church, here is the people, open the doors and here are the people", signifying that the United Church of Christ takes in people from many backgrounds. The rest of the time was devoted to voting and discussion on the different amendments. By the time we finished the whole Synod, I felt drained.

This was a learning, stretching, wonderful experience for me. There were a lot of good times and some confusing times. If given the opportunity to attend again, because of this experience, I would study the information for sessions more carefully to be better prepared. Our morning breakfasts at the Synod were very valuable to help shed light on the issues we would be voting on later.

Mahalo nui for the opportunity to: represent Hawaii, travel to meet and share in cultural exchanges, and worship with God's people. God is still speaking. I'm listening.