



The Friend

The Oldest Newspaper West Of The Rocky Mountains | Founded 1843 | Volume 40, Issue 4 | September 2024



IMPACT

What is Success?

Last June at the ‘Aha Pae‘āina Karen Georgia Thompson, General Minister and President of the United Church of Christ, was asked “how do you measure success in a church?” She answered, “success has to be rooted in impact. We are accustomed to success as dollars and cents. The more you have, the more successful you are. We treat people like money, too. The more people you have in church, the more successful you are. The A, B, C’s of church: Attendance (high), Building (big), Cash (lots of it). But none of that speaks to impact.”

And this challenge pushed our writers and us as editors to some deep thoughts. David Popham, our conference minister, even pushed back on using the word “success” when he writes, “a vital and crucial shift away from the paradigm of success and toward the paradigm of faithfulness. Success is about numbers, whereas faithfulness is about relationships. Success is about winning, whereas faithfulness is about tenacity.” Preston Iha explores success through a lens of aloha as he writes, “Jesus is Aloha, and as His followers our impact and success are measured by our witnessing and guidance towards Aloha.” And Kristin Young challenges us to flip the question as she explains, “talking about youth impact... what if, in addition to measuring how our youth are impacted, we measure the ways we are letting our youth impact us? How are we allowing them to express their faith through our church? How do our youth inspire us to reshape the world and church we will leave them?”

Success is multi-dimensional. Success is not based on one event in the life of the church or a single metric; being successful is an ongoing process in which the church is continuously in a state of becoming: becoming more faithful, more engaged, more impactful, more compassionate, more giving, more loving, more Christlike.


As Thompson emphasizes later in her interview about the subject

of impact, “that is what’s reshaping the church. People talking about the ways in which the church is doing all these positive things and impacting the community. [It is] vibrant and dynamic... When we have the ability to serve [to address social issues], we are impacting something greater than what is happening in our communities. That’s what measuring impact looks like—it’s about looking at what we have and determining how what we have done impacts those who are around us, but also in the microcosm and in the macro of our existence.”

As you read this issue, our Editorial Team encourages you to ask: How do we measure success or faithfulness in your congregation? Where are we making an impact?



This answer became the driving theme for this issue of *The Friend* as our Editorial Team posed the same question to people across our Conference. From our conference minister to a member in discernment from O‘ahu who is just starting a Master of Divinity degree to lay people engaged in youth ministry, writers took on this challenge.



God is still speaking

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The views expressed belong to the authors and do not necessarily represent the Hawai‘i Conference.

They Will Know We Are Christians by Our Aloha

PRESTON IHA, NU'UANU CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH; MASTER OF DIVINITY STUDENT, HARVARD DIVINITY SCHOOL



As I begin my studies at Harvard Divinity School, I reflect on the charge my parents left me with: “never forget where you’re from.” Their words bring to mind 1 John 4:8,

proclaiming, “aloha ke Akua,” meaning “God is love.” During times of change, faith and culture have been exceptional blessings, providing me with a foundation to stand, face the unknown, and declare that anything I pursue or achieve in this life is nothing if I have not aloha.

When considering how the emerging Church might understand “impact” and “success,” I cannot help but believe that Hawai‘i will help the Church navigate new realities. Christianity has always undergone indigenization and localization. However, after reaching the shores of Hawai‘i, the global Church was exposed to a concept that has, and must continue to, revolutionize how we follow Christ: Aloha. A sacred word and, as many kūpuna have taught me, one that goes far beyond its standard English translation as “love.”

As defined in state law and by countless kūpuna, ALOHA as an acronym might be thought of as follows:

- **Akahai:** kindness, expressed with tenderness,
- **Lōkahi:** unity, expressed with harmony,
- **Olu‘olu:** agreeableness, expressed with pleasantness,
- **Ha‘aha‘a:** humility, expressed with modesty, and
- **Ahonu:** patience, expressed with perseverance.

These values have shaped generations and, with the Spirit’s guidance, might shape the future of the Church. In discerning what it means to be the Church during a time of volatile change and uncertainty, our success and impact must be defined by ALOHA.

In a time of shrinking physical congregations, we ought to remember that aloha has never been quantifiable nor quantity our priority. While churches have often been defined by their numbers and walls, the Church never has. God is still a living God, speaking, guiding, comforting, celebrating, moving, and loving. Our job, as faithful disciples, is not to manage aloha but to live it. ALOHA demands action; therefore, “success” and any meaningful impact must be defined by answering a critical question: Are we earnestly, sincerely, and wholly pursuing ALOHA in everything?

Jesus is Aloha, and as His followers our impact and success are measured by our witnessing and guidance towards Aloha. Are we tending to our unhoused neighbors to ensure their human rights are guarded and basic needs secured? Do we strive to be in harmony with all of God’s creation, even with those with whom we disagree? Have we acted with pleasantness to ensure that all feel

welcome in God’s ‘ohana? Has the Church, in modest humility, accepted its perpetration of actions contrary to God’s will, sought forgiveness from those it has hurt, and rectified its wrongs? Are we, through faith, hope, and aloha, persevering until the Kingdom comes in fullness to redeem all creation? As for the Church, there can be no success or meaningful impact if our focus is not on pursuing Aloha. And when we so orient our focus, our impact becomes sharing aloha with all of creation and our success is the aloha present in our lives and communities.

The holistic understanding of aloha that our kūpuna teach compels us to acknowledge that the impact and success of the Church can only be achieved as an ongoing effort. We may never practice aloha perfectly (for who can emulate Christ flawlessly?), but we are called to walk with Him. I know where I’m from and am uplifted and inspired by the aloha of my fellow kama‘āina, my Church, and my God. Hawai‘i can show the world what it means to live aloha and measure all success by that metric. I do not know how that will all play out practically. However, I know that our Lord assured us that they will know we are Christians, that we are His disciples, by our ALOHA.



PHOTO CREDIT: SHUTTERSTOCK

It's Time to Talk About Faithfulness

DAVID K. POPHAM, CONFERENCE MINISTER

The church of my youth had a grid to help us understand if we had been good in our life as Christians. This grid appeared on the Sunday School Offering envelope and added up to our weekly “grade” in Sunday School. Present (20%), On Time (10%), Brought Bible (10%), Brought Offering (10%), Studied the Lesson (30%), Stayed for Sermon (20%). The simple measurement with easily understood results allowed us to instantly know how good or not-so-good a follower of Christ we were that week.



Resolution on Gaza workshop
PHOTO CREDIT: KALANI WONG

Similarly, during the days of my youth, the matrix for measuring church success was well known. Among them were Average Weekly Attendance, Average Weekly Offering, Youth Participation, and growth margins measured in Annual Baptisms, Deaths, and Withdrawals. While a little more abstract than my weekly Sunday School grade, these markers could tell you immediately how your congregation was measuring up.

What these former markers indicate is that the church of yesteryear was fixated on itself. Nothing in the older matrix (outside the possibility of youth engagement) sought to ascertain the impact of the congregation in the community. Rather that matrix delivered a moral vision of the church as a privileged institution to be served by the community. Such a vision focused attention on what made our churches unique and, thereby, qualified for the service expected from the community.

Thankfully this vision of the church was rejected by both those inside and outside our walls. A church centered on Jesus Christ can never be an institution centered upon itself with accompanying thoughts of privilege. Heeding the call of the Spirit to move beyond such narcissistic navel-gazing of the past, we now find ourselves in the strange world of seeking a new matrix that might help us understand that our strength is in how we impact the wider community we serve.

Luckily, we need only to turn to the ministry of Jesus to determine the outlines of such a matrix for our time.

- Are we relevant? How are we showing up in lives which have been disrupted by pain or oppression?

- Are we creative? How are we working with people to move beyond unhealthy understandings of God to insights and beliefs that liberate them to know God more fully and more intimately?

- Are we alive in Christ? How do we take the joy of our salvation

into a world weighted with polarization and division?

- Are we imaginative?

Can we see “church” being done in ways that are unfamiliar in their form but familiar in their subject of God’s love?

- Are we theologically innovative? Does our theology push us to engage the world in its struggles even when the answers are not clear and leave us uncomfortable?

- Are we proactive? Do we speak about contemporary issues with clarity and conviction or do we demure for fear of upsetting others?

A warning: once a congregation embraces such a new matrix for measuring itself, it makes a crucial shift away from the paradigm of success and toward the paradigm of faithfulness. Success is about numbers, whereas faithfulness is about relationships. Success is about winning, whereas faithfulness is about tenacity. Success is about feeling good about us, whereas faithfulness is about engaging a world fraught with trouble. In seeking to be faithful there is no doubt that we will emerge battered and bruised, for our wider communities have little need of cliched answers to tough questions or words in place of actions. But we will also emerge with a great shout of “hallelujah” to the work of God in the world.

I continue to praise Ke Akua for the tenacious faithfulness of our congregations and their engagements with their communities. I pray they know that their faithfulness is invaluable to God’s work in the world.



Successful Management of Your Church's Investments

ANDREW BUNN, HCF EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



If your congregation is fortunate enough to have funds that can be set aside for investment, success hinges on a well-structured investment management process. As fiduciaries, your

governing board members bear the ultimate responsibility for the proper stewardship of these assets. To ensure success, the board should implement a strategic approach grounded in planning, skilled oversight, and transparency.

First and foremost, the board must establish clear financial objectives for the church's investments. Whether the goal is long-term growth, generating income, preserving capital, or achieving a targeted return, these objectives provide a crucial framework for decision-making and help maintain focus on the church's financial health. Equally important is ensuring that the church's investment strategy reflects its mission and values. Investments should align with the church's ethical standards, avoiding industries such as tobacco, gambling, alcohol, or weapons manufacturing, which may conflict with the congregation's beliefs. Regular reviews and periodic adjustments to these objectives are necessary to ensure they remain relevant and achievable over time.

Diversification is key to balancing risk and return within the investment portfolio. The board should ensure

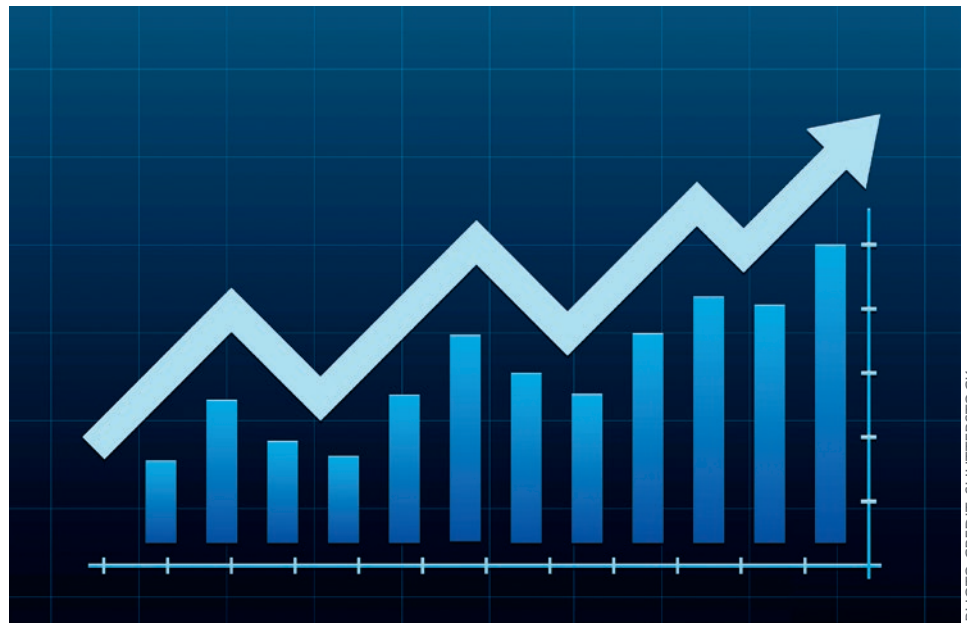
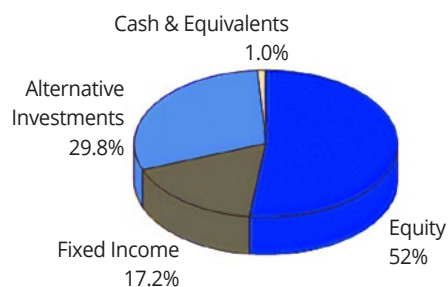


PHOTO CREDIT: SHUTTERSTOCK

that investments are spread across various asset classes, including equities, fixed income, real estate, and alternative investments, to mitigate the impact of market volatility. Regular monitoring of the portfolio is critical to maintaining its effectiveness. By assessing performance against established benchmarks and making proactive adjustments, the board can respond to changing market conditions or shifts in the church's financial situation, ensuring that the portfolio continues to meet its objectives.



To support a consistent and effective investment strategy, the board should develop a robust investment policy statement (IPS). This document should outline the church's investment philosophy, asset allocation strategy, risk tolerance, benchmarks, and guidelines for review and reporting. Because board membership rotates over time, having a well-documented IPS is essential for ensuring

continuity and the long-term success of the church's investment program.

Recognizing that no board can manage these responsibilities alone, it is essential to appoint an investment committee to carry out this work under the board's oversight. The board should ensure that the committee comprises members with diverse skills, including financial expertise, market knowledge, legal insight, and an understanding of ethical investing. A variety of perspectives fosters comprehensive decision-making, which is vital for effective management. The board should also support ongoing education and training for committee members to keep them informed of developments in finance and ethical investing. It is crucial that all committee members fully understand and agree with the IPS to maintain a cohesive approach.

Additionally, the board and investment committee should seek external financial advice from reputable experienced advisors, especially for complex investments or as the portfolio grows significantly. Any external advice must align with the church's mission and adhere to the guidelines set out in the IPS.

Transparency and accountability

... continued on page 8



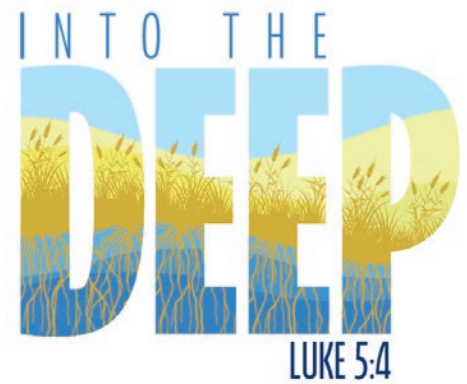


General Synod 35 Theme, Rules, and Deadlines Announced

General Synod, the biennial meeting of the United Church of Christ (UCC), will be held July 11 – 15, 2025, in Kansas City, Missouri. This will be the last time the General Synod will be held biennially, as delegates to General Synod 34 in 2023 voted to move the meeting to every third year. The UCC Board has approved the standing rules for the upcoming General Synod 35, and the posting of the standing rules serves as the official call to the meeting.

The theme for General Synod 35 is “Into the Deep,” and is based on Luke 5:4: “When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, ‘Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch.’”

Any completed resolutions must be submitted to the Resolution Review Team on or before **October 31, 2024**. Resolutions need not be in their final form but should be as complete as possible and must have the entire text of the motion



complete. Final submissions must be made on or before **December 31, 2024**.



Mission Offering:

Support the Christmas Fund Offering

Gifts to the annual Christmas Fund special mission offering embody the spirit of the season by supporting those in need who have faithfully served the church.

Formerly known as the Veterans of the Cross offering, the fund is administered by the UCC Pension Boards and provides direct financial assistance to retired and active United Church of Christ authorized ministers, lay employees, and their surviving spouses, including pension and health premium supplementation, emergency assistance, and Christmas gift checks to hundreds of annuitants.

The Christmas Fund for Veterans of the Cross and the Emergency Fund is one of four UCC special mission offerings. The recommended date to receive this offering is Sunday, December 22, but local churches are encouraged to pick an Advent or Christmas date that works best for them.

... “Successful Management of Your Church’s Investments” continued from page 5.

are important for maintaining trust within the church community. The board should require the investment committee to provide regular updates on the portfolio’s performance, any changes in investment strategy, and how these investments support the church’s mission. This communication should be extended to the broader congregation when appropriate while fostering openness and trust.

The church board, through its investment committee, plays a pivotal role in ensuring the success of the church’s investment strategy. By aligning investments with the church’s mission, supporting a skilled and diverse committee, setting clear financial objectives, and maintaining transparency, the board can secure the church’s financial future. These principles will enable the church

to manage its assets effectively and continue its mission for years to come.

If your church has funds for long-term investment but lacks the resources to manage its own investment program, the Hawai’i Conference Foundation offers member churches the opportunity to invest with the Foundation and access its investment resources. Please contact us if we can be of service.

Redefining Success in Youth Ministry

KRISTEN YOUNG, UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST - JUDD STREET

“How many youth do you have at your church?” Maybe you’ve been asked this question before, or have asked it of others. When on the receiving end, as a youth director whose paid job is to have youth at church, I’ve gotten a bit defensive when answering this question as the response is, in some ways, a reflection of my ministry. I’d often try to inflate the number, rounding up and including that one person who came one time.



But I know people don’t ask this question to rate the effectiveness of my work. I think we’re just curious to know how we compare with others in terms of youth impact. The higher the number of youth reached, the greater the impact, right? That is probably the easiest way to measure, but it’s definitely not the only way or even the best way. These quantitative metrics can be a surefire way to set ourselves up for disappointment while not really measuring success.

It’s no secret that many of our

churches are struggling to engage young people these days. Getting more young people is a top priority for many churches as this is the natural solution to keep the church alive as our congregations age. It is the underlying assumption that “the youth will take over and continue our legacy.” But youth are more than the future church, more than potential new volunteers or giving units, or even souls to be saved. Their output (or lack thereof) within our church organizations, now or after they’ve aged out of youth programming, should be the least of our concerns.

What if, in addition to counting how many youth showed up for an



event, we count how many times we prayed for them during the week or asked them how they’re doing? What if, in addition to tallying

baptisms and confirmations, we tally the number of youth who felt safe enough to tell us about their sexual orientation or gender identity? What if, in addition to ensuring youth show up for their role in worship, we show up for youth in their lives outside the church? What if, in addition to noting the times a youth reads in worship, we note how many questions they feel free to ask us as they develop their faith? What if, instead of looking at youth attendance, we look at the funds designated for youth ministry in our church budget?

Talking about youth impact... what if, in addition to measuring how

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.

our youth are impacted, we measure the ways we are letting our youth impact us? How are we allowing them to express their faith through our church? How do our youth inspire us to reshape the world and church we will leave them?

Youth ministry, its goals and impacts, will look different in different contexts. Many young people simply can’t make it to church because they are too busy trying to survive and thrive in this world created by past generations. If you don’t have youth at your church, work for a livable future for today’s youth to grow up in – that could be your youth ministry. Youth ministry could be about reaching hundreds of youth, and it could also be about reaching 100% of the youth within your reach, even if it’s only one – like the grandchild of a longtime member that comes in the summer.

My faith grew the most outside of the church, when I applied what I learned in church to the world around me. Church is not the only place where faith is practiced, so church attendance is hardly a good way to measure impact. God calls us to so much more than worship services, Bible studies, camps and retreats, church-sponsored activities. Maybe a better question to ask than “How many youth do you have at your church?” would be, “How do your youth know they are loved?”

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.

Kristen was an active youth participant in her local church and the HCUCU throughout her childhood and has worked in youth ministry at three different churches in her three decades of life.

News from our Associations and Affiliates

Happy 1st Anniversary, Kokua Kapa'a!

BOB OELKE, KAPA'A UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

[This article was originally written in April 2024 around the first anniversary of Kokua Kapa'a.]

In John 21 verses 15-18, Jesus tells Peter three times to "feed my sheep."

While the reference here was probably spiritual food, I think we can bring it to the physical food as well. EVERYONE must eat, and many friendships have been started over a meal.

When we began Kokua Kapa'a that Sunday in April 2023, we were unsure what would happen. Would anyone come? We had put out flyers and social media posts, but still we wondered.

The first people started to trickle in and by the end of day we had fed and had 24 people shopping for groceries. We were a little disappointed, but it was a start. The next week was a little better and it has continued to grow. Our record number of shoppers was 91; however, that record was broken on our anniversary Sunday when we had 104 shoppers and handed out 177 meals! This was amazing!

These are people that depend on these groceries to get through a week. Many times, we have been told that this food is what is keeping them alive!

In the past year, we have had 3,024 people shop for food in our "store"!!!

At first, we were only able to give out sandwiches since our kitchen had not been certified, but now we can cook and serve hot meals! People love it! Last week we served and delivered 134 hot meals! That's amazing! A big shout out to our cooks! Lots of hard work and love goes into the meal each week. We use food that we get from the Food Bank so costs are minimal.

Michael took meals and groceries to a family group in Anahola for many months. He recently received the following text.

"Hi, just wanted to let you know that there is no longer a need here to drop off food and meals, etc. Just wanted to thank you so much for your love to help the community and people like myself, that were going through difficult times. The family purchased a nice SUV and if there is a need in the future, there is no reason why we can't drive to the foodbank like everybody else. Some new jobs too have become available, allowing the guys to be financially secure. When I first reached out for help, I was embarrassed and felt ashamed, and you really took that away by reassuring me that it was okay and especially when you said to let you know our needs etc. That was so kind of you to go out of your way for others. You really are like a real angel. And the other cars are in good working condition too, in the event that there is a need in the future we know where to go because of you, Much Love and Aloha."

They told him verbally that because they saved money on food, they were able to get the cars repaired! Our clients are always grateful for what they get, and we get really excited about helping them survive another week!

Knowing we are making a big difference in feeding people is very rewarding and I am eternally grateful for the faithful volunteers who keep this project going.



PHOTO CREDIT: COURTESY OF BOB OELKE



PHOTO CREDIT: SHUTTERSTOCK

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 has been called to serve as the interim pastor of Wahiawa United Church of Christ on O‘ahu. His first Sunday was July 14. Vance is also serving as a military chaplain in the U.S. Army.



EJ Ravago has been called to serve as the settled pastor of Waialua United Church of Christ on O‘ahu. His first Sunday was July 28.

Jack Belsom ended his ministry with Iao United Church of Christ as their interim pastor and retired (for the third time!). His last Sunday was August 25.



Scott Landis has been called to serve Wānanalua Congregational Church in Hāna, Maui as their designated term

pastor for the next three months. His first Sunday was September 1. Scott is part of the Kahu Hui who provide coverage of the pulpit on a rotating basis for Wānanalua Congregational Church.

Service of Installation

Jonathan Lilley was installed as pastor and teacher of The First Chinese Church of Christ in Hawai‘i by the O‘ahu Association on September 22.



Conference Staff

Vivian Maunakea, the Hawai‘i Conference Office Ambassador of



Aloha and receptionist, celebrated 35 years of service on August 14! She started out as a bookkeeper for our accounting department in 1989 and has continued to serve the Conference in various roles ever since. Her

Conference Calendar of Events

SEPTEMBER 7 AND 21

Anti-Racism training; two-part workshop

SEPTEMBER 24 - 26

Pastoral Leaders Retreat, Honomū, Hawai‘i Island

OCTOBER 19

Hawai‘i Island Association Fall Mokupuni
O‘ahu Association Fall Mokupuni

OCTOBER 26

State Council of Hawaiian Congregational Churches

NOVEMBER 3

Kaua‘i Fall Mokupuni

NOVEMBER 16

HCF Board of Directors/Conference Council

warmth, sense of humor, ready smile, and genuine love for her ministry have made her the heart of the Conference office!

In Memory

Nofotolu Alo, 84, retired ordained minister who was living in American Samoa, passed away on May 30, 2024. He was ordained by the Congregational Christian Church of American Samoa (CCCAS) in 1999 and was granted ordained ministerial standing in the O‘ahu Association of the Hawai‘i Conference UCC in 2007. He served as Senior Pastor of Messenger of the Light Church in Waipahu (1998 – 2003) and Bethel of Amazing Grace (2003 – 2013) and was the interim pastor of Trinity Samoan Church in Honolulu (2013 – 2015). He was an active member of Waipahu UCC and served on the O‘ahu Association Board of Directors (2003 – 2006). He was also a member of the Hawai‘i Samoan Council of Churches. He and his wife, Manhart “Mandy” Alo moved to American Samoa in 2015. He has four adult children.

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.

September 2024

HO'ĀLA HOU

Our Faith, Our Vote, Our Voice

The one thing that both major political parties agree on is that the stakes have never been higher in an election year, let alone a presidential election year. The challenges are great, and it is easy to feel overwhelmed and hopeless. Yet despite these challenges, it still matters that we vote. It still matters that we care enough to protect the rights of others to vote.

As Sandy Sorensen, former director of the UCC's Washington, D.C. Office, reminds us, "our vote is our voice—it is an important way to participate in the common good and to help shape policy. Faith voices are essential and unique in the electoral process."

As faith voices, we want to remember to be bold, be prophetic, but NOT partisan. Churches, as 501(c)(3) organizations under the Internal

Revenue Code, are prohibited from taking part in any partisan activity. What does this mean? For one, churches can and should speak out



on issues they care about but should never tell people how to vote or for whom they should vote. Churches and pastors cannot express support for or opposition to any particular

candidate. You can educate church members about election-year issues and promote discussion of public policy. You can hold nonpartisan voter registration and get-out-the-vote drives, distribute non-partisan voter guides and voter records, and sponsor candidate forums and debates, as long as all candidates for a particular office are invited to participate. Clergy are able to engage in a political campaign or political discussion as individuals, as long as they make it clear that they are acting as individuals and not on behalf of the church, and they don't endorse or oppose a particular candidate in a church publication or at a church function on church grounds.

So go out and exercise your right to vote, and encourage others to do so, too! Your vote is your voice!