

HŌ'IKE

VISIONS OF PARADISE

Hawaii Conference
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God is With Us

Erik VanDenburgh
President



As I look back over my life, I have so many fond memories growing up in the Pacific Northwest. One of my favorite things was going to my best friend Seth's house in the Blue Mountains of Washington. When you were at Seth's house, there were so many fun things to do outside. We would go swimming in his pool, ride dirt bikes on the logging roads, and build forts in the woods.

December 1, 2023, was a significant date that I will remember for some time to come. It had been 125 days since the fire broke out in Lahaina, and we were entering the church property for the first time.

Two days earlier, I was flying over to Maui to meet with Maranatha North

American project director David Woods when I received the message that section 11D was going to be open for re-entry. This was very exciting news, as we had been trying to gain access for quite some time. The process to gain access was not terribly difficult, but it did require about an hour's worth of time filling out paperwork and listening to short briefings on how to stay safe while on-site. Once those tasks were completed, I was issued the long-awaited re-entry permit.

Pastor Vassili graciously offered to pick up Pastor Jay and me from the airport and take us into Lahaina. After clearing the military checkpoint, we drove into the burn zone. The images

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we started to behold were not easy to witness. Everything was black and had turned to ash. The only things standing were charred metal car frames, block walls, and burned-out trees. People dressed in white protective suits were periodically seen processing their great loss while surveying what used to be their homes.

After pulling into the church parking lot, we too began to put on the protective gear issued to us to keep us safe while sifting through the rubble. We went first to the sanctuary, which had a sign on the door that read, "Inspected – Lawful Occupancy Permitted." What a blessing! Not only did we know that our sanctuary was still standing, but the building had been inspected and determined to be structurally sound.

Once inside, Pastor Jay sat down at the piano and filled the sanctuary with music, playing the hymn "Blessed Assurance." We then stood in a circle and offered a prayer of thanksgiving that God had protected the sanctuary and that He would use it to be a source of healing to those in the community.

After retrieving a few items from the back room that belonged to a few church members, we made our way to the far side of the property and looked over what used to be the pastor's parsonage. We were able to make out a few items such as an air conditioner, bathtub, hot water heater, and stove. We found the remnants of a laptop computer and what used to be boxes of colporteur books left from the literature evangelists who had been staying there. While we were sad to see the loss of the structure and personal property, it reminded us of how thankful we were that everyone had made it out safely and that we hadn't experienced any loss of life.

Eventually, we made our way over to the fellowship hall. While not expecting to find anything worth salvaging, I slowly walked through the ash, scanning for objects. It wasn't until I made it to the back corner that I noticed something out of place. There was a burned-out electrical panel lying on the ash that had a few white objects on top of it. To my surprise, it was a small nativity figurine set. Obviously, this had not fallen into place just by chance. One of



the first responders had found it in the ash and recognized the value of taking the time to dust it off and set it up.

To me, this was a very significant moment. While everything around was filled with chaos and destruction, Jesus was still present. He was amongst the ash and the rubble. Just like He had done so long ago, He chose to come down into our mess and be present! He said, "I see you, I see what you are going through, and I choose to be with you because you are valuable to me!"

Matthew 1:21, 23 says, "And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins.... 'Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel,' which is translated, 'God with us'" (NKJV).

No matter what we go through in this world, we should always remember we have a Savior whose name is Jesus. He has saved us from our sins, and He is with us!

Despite all the destruction, we were encouraged by our visit to the Lahaina church. The road to recovery will be long, but we know God has a plan to bring something beautiful out of the ashes.

Please keep our church's response efforts in your prayers as plans are being laid to bring relief and assistance to those who are hurting.

By Erik VanDenburgh



Christmas in Our Schools

The schools in the Hawaii Conference were overflowing with school spirit and Christmas spirit in December as their first semester came to a close. Students showcased their talents as they performed in Christmas concerts across the islands. Music, songs, hymns, and plays were enjoyed by all who attended these events. We can't wait to see what the new year holds in store for our students and their schools. Mele Kalikimaka me ka Hau'oli Makahiki Hou from:

- Adventist Malama Elementary School**
- Hawaiian Mission Academy**
- Hawaiian Mission Academy Ka Lama Iki**
- Hawaiian Mission Academy Maui**
- Hawaiian Mission Academy Windward Campus**
- Kahili Adventist Preschool**
- Kahili Adventist School**
- Kohala Adventist School**
- Kona Adventist Christian School**
- Maui Adventist Pre-elementary School**
- Mauna Loa Preschool**
- Mauna Loa School**





By Caleb Schaber

A Season for Celebration: Honolulu Central's 50th Anniversary and Christmas Concert

On Saturday, Dec. 9, the Honolulu Central church congregation came together to celebrate a ribbon cutting ceremony for their newly renovated sanctuary. After six months of restoration and refurbishment, the sanctuary of the church was ready for worship just in time for the church to celebrate its 50th anniversary. Former and current pastors of the Honolulu Central church came together for the occasion and were recognized for all they've done for the church over the years. During the service, conference president Erik VanDenburgh shared a few words of encouragement with the members of the church.

"We celebrate the building today, and we are so excited to do so," said VanDenburgh. "But let's remember the work is not done when the building is built. We come to learn of a crucified and risen Savior who has given us a purpose, and that is to go to a dying world. May the celebration of the building be an inspiration to us to tell the world that Jesus is coming again someday soon. Let's join in that wonderful message."

The Sabbath and the anniversary celebration were closed with a Christmas concert performed by the students from three different schools who came together to share their music. Over 100 talented students from Hawaiian Mission Academy (HMA), Adventist Malama Elementary School (AMES), and HMA Ka Lama Iki filled the newly renovated sanctuary with the sounds of holiday joy. The principal at HMA Ka Lama Iki, and one of the coordinators for the concert, Sarah Traczyk, shared why this concert was so special.

"For this Christmas season, to present a growing mission of unity in Adventist education across Oahu, HMA, AMES, and

HMA Ka Lama Iki came together to create a collaborative program full of Hawaiian and island culture," said Sarah. "A collective program seemed daunting at first, but seeing the students' hard work and interest in the instruments, hula, mele, and a chance to be leaders encouraged the principals to keep moving forward. The school parent/teacher organizations jumped right in as well to prepare food and a place to fellowship after the program. God blessed the schools with a newly renovated church that sat over 600 people. The principals received so much positive feedback that we hope to continue the tradition for years to come."

This Christmas concert was the perfect ending for a weekend of celebration. Honolulu Central church was blessed by all the students who came from Ka Lama Iki, AMES, and HMA to share their music for the holidays. We are so happy that this church has been part of our conference 'ohana for 50 years, and we can't wait to see where God will lead it next.

