

Hoiike

October 2023

News and Inspiration for Seventh-day Adventists
in the Hawaii Conference



Erik VanDenburgh
President

Hawaii Conference
of Seventh-day Adventists

Pulling Together as 'Ohana

"By this, everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another" (John 13:35, NIV).

Waking up to the news that the town of Lahaina was on fire and had mostly burned was devastating. I was in Phoenix, Arizona, at the North American Division Educators' Convention when I received the news. With a flood of emotion, I knew I had to get home and be with our people.

It took some coordination to rearrange flights and figure out how to pick up my boys from Grandma and Grandpa's house in California, but it came together quite quickly. While headed to the airport and between flights, I learned of efforts being made to house fire evacuees at the Kahului church. Pastor Ben Williams, who had recently transitioned from the Lahaina and Kihei church district to Oahu, was willing to jump on an airplane to be able to receive his former church members as they arrived at the church. I was so thankful that he had time to run to Walmart and buy a bunch of air mattresses, bedding, food, and toiletries and have everything set up by the time people reached the church.

As people started to flood into the church, Pastor Ben said members were asking if it would be OK if family members who were not

Adventist could come and stay as well. I responded with an absolute yes. Pastor Vassili said, "I think we had about a hundred people stay over at the church the first night." Vassili Khrapov, pastor of the Kahului church, had also been displaced and was staying at the church as fires had threatened his home in Upcountry.

After I flew into Maui and met with the church leadership team, it became evident that we needed assistance. A small disaster response team was quickly assembled from people on Oahu. Pastor Mark Tamaleaa, our Adventist Community Services director, flew in to help coordinate efforts between the church and government agencies. Mario Bravo, our literature ministries director, who happened to be on Maui leading a team of colporteurs, jumped right in to lead meal planning and food preparation. Pastor Ramel Ramos flew in to start providing pastoral care for his new Lahaina church family. Susie Mota, who oversees payroll and HR in our office, came to assist with helping people process paperwork. Melanie Ramirez joined the team to coordinate short- and long-term assistance, and, finally, two of our volunteer missionaries came to assist where needed.

Over the next two weeks, I saw so much love being poured out through our church. Local members stopped by to lend a hand

Continued on page 2

Continued from page 1 in the kitchen, put on birthday celebrations, provide medical care, and just talk story. One family that owned a private rental car company even decided to lend cars to families who had lost vehicles in the fire and had no other means of transportation. Miki Nelson, our superintendent of schools, brought a small team of teachers over on Sabbath to minister at the Kihei church in the morning and then at the Kahului church in the afternoon. They played games with the keiki and brought smiles to the children's faces. Out of grief and sadness, I could see joy start to peek through as a community of Jesus showed love and kindness to those who had lost so much.

I'm truly thankful for the support we received from individuals who were compelled to give financially. This generosity enabled us to take immediate action when we encountered people in need. We were able to place money in people's hands so they could buy clothes and basic necessities. We were able to fund students' tuition, both at the elementary school and academy. We helped sponsor rental cars and provided real financial resources to relieve larger monthly expenses.

I firmly believe this type of care is what Jesus was referring to in Matthew 25 when He said, "For I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison, and you came to Me.... Inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me" (Matthew 25:35-36, 40, NKJV).

When we can respond to those with basic yet vital needs, it softens hearts and allows them to see Jesus. It's moments like these that make me incredibly proud of our church and the mission that drives us—to share Jesus' love with a hurting world.

By the end of the second week, Melanie was able to help secure semi-permanent housing in local hotels where the evacuees could stay for up to seven months. When it came time for everyone to say goodbye, nobody wanted to

leave. One uncle said, "I'm staying in a five-star hotel but, to be honest, if I could have it my way, I would rather sleep on the floor at the church. These people took us in. They provided for our needs and showed us love. We became a family."

He went on to say that before the fire his family had been impressed that they needed to start going to church, but he didn't know which one to go to because there were so many. He followed up by saying, "But this church made it easy for us to decide."

While it can seem like the immediate needs are being met, we know it is going to be a long road ahead for healing to take place and for people's lives to be reestablished. As I made the short 25-minute flight home between the islands of Maui and Oahu, I was thinking about the time I had spent away from my home, and yet there are others who have no home to return to. I was thinking about the images of blocks upon blocks of burned-out houses, once filled with happy families, now possibly lying among the ashes. And finally, I asked myself how I could bring long-term healing to the people of Lahaina who have suffered so much.

The answer I keep hearing is that we need to help them return home. Not to another family member's house. Not to a hotel room. But home. I truly believe we can help them do this, and we can start in the very near future. I believe we can pull together as 'ohana. To be there for those in need. To provide real help here on earth. I believe they will know that we are His disciples because we showed love to one another.

Plans are being laid to provide meaningful assistance and help homeowners return to their land. Please ask God how He might use you to make a difference. Donations are greatly appreciated and are being received on the Hawaii Conference website, www.hawaiiada.com, under Maui Fire Relief. Thank you for your willingness to give, for your prayers, and for helping us be part of the hands and feet of Jesus to a dying world.

By Erik VanDenburgh



Hawaii Welcomes New Teachers

Sara Baroro is the principal at Hawaiian Mission Academy (HMA). Sara has worked in Adventist Christian education for over 18 years in various positions, starting as a preschool teacher, then an elementary PE teacher, and most recently in various teaching and administrative roles at the high school level for over 10 years. She started in Christian education in order to spend more time with her own children, who are now all grown up. When she thinks about Adventist education, she understands it is more than an education; it is educating the whole student for eternity. Sara and her husband both attended HMA. As an alum, serving as the HMA principal this year is one way of giving back to a community that helped shape their lives.



Jonielle Belonio is the third- and fourth-grade teacher at Mauna Loa School in Hilo, Hawaii. Joni earned her bachelor's degree in elementary education from Southern Adventist University in Tennessee. Following her graduation, she served as a student missionary at Mauna Loa School and later taught third and fourth grade in Atlanta, Georgia. She is thrilled to return to the Big Island. Joni is known for her enthusiasm in the classroom, often incorporating music and movement to keep her students engaged and energized. Her ultimate goal is to create a nurturing classroom environment where children can develop a deep love for Jesus Christ.



Misael Bernard, a local boy born and raised on the island of Oahu, is the history and Bible teacher at Hawaiian Mission Academy. Misael graduated from Pacific Union College this past June with a Bachelor of Science



degree in history, political science, ethics, and pre-law and a minor in emergency management. His goals include traveling the world and surfing in the different waters around the world, going to the Antarctic, and enjoying this beautiful world that the Lord has blessed us with. He desires to do all he does to the best of his ability, and he looks forward to working with the students at HMA, seeing them grow in a Christ-centered environment!

Cheryne Ellis is the kindergarten through grade two teacher at Adventist Malama Elementary School in Waianae, Oahu. Cheryne was born and raised in Plano, Texas, and attended Southwestern Adventist University, where she graduated in 2016 with a degree in general studies with an emphasis in education. Cheryne and her husband, Joshua, an active-duty chaplain in the military, have been married for over 20 years. They have an 11-year-old daughter, Chloe, and nine-year-old twin boys, Joshua and Noah. In her free time, Cheryne likes to go on walks, watch football, shop, exercise, bake, watch movies, travel, try new restaurants, and be with family and friends.



Elliot Fullmer is the teaching principal at Kona Adventist Christian School on the island of Hawaii. Elliot grew up in the church as a fourth-generation Adventist and is a product of Adventist education from grade 1 through college. He started life in the northwestern U.S. states of Oregon, Washington, and Idaho. It was there that he first started developing a love for missions from reading mission stories. While he was in the second grade, his family moved to the Southwest state of New Mexico. After graduating from Champion Academy, Elliot attended several Adventist colleges, mainly Union, but he graduated from Southwestern with a degree in theology. His



Continued on page 4

Continued from page 3

original intent was to become a Bible teacher in an academy, but God led him to work for a short while as an associate pastor. He then went back into education, where he got his elementary certification and eventually a master's degree in special education. Elliot has taught in public school as a SPED teacher and in Adventist schools in single grade and multigrade classrooms. He and his family spent 10 years working in Taiwan. Prior to coming to Hawaii, the Fullmers spent two school years volunteering as principal of an Adventist K-12 school in Cambodia. Elliot and his wife, Amanda, have three children—two daughters who are in their 20s and a son who is 7. They feel blessed to be in Kona and pray that God will bless their efforts to share His love with the children and families at KACS.

Isabel McMillan

is the English teacher at Hawaiian Mission Academy. Isabel received a B.A. from Pacific Union College and is on the verge of completing a master's in curriculum and instruction in education at La Sierra University. Isabel finds great joy in helping students discover books they truly love—initiating their exploration into new ideas, cultures, and mesmerizing worlds. Beyond instruction, Isabel relishes learning from her students and hearing about their passions and interests.



To Gain a Heart of Wisdom

Driving through the devastation left behind by the fire in Lahaina reminded me of the words of my mentor pastor, Ben George, many years ago. He had grown up atheist in the rough streets of Lebanon, miraculously found an Adventist school to attend, was baptized, and became a pastor. He was still bench-pressing 225 lbs. well into his 60s, and he loved playing soccer with the church kids on Sunday mornings. He was a powerful preacher and a man of prayer.

On one particular day, we were visiting together and passed a large mega-church in the Phoenix area. When I voiced my admiration of the huge complex, his only response was, "It's all future ashes, brother!"

That comment stuck in my young mind and has given me perspective over the years. It is all future ashes: our churches, offices, homes, hospitals, schools. Everything is temporary and can be gone in the blink of an eye.

We humans are particularly fragile, and life is tenuous at best. Jeremiah noted, "Through the Lord's mercies we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning"

(Lamentations 3:22-23, NKJV). I think it is wise for us to stop our busyness from time to time and remember how gracious our God is to spare us from the evil that stalks our world. Moses comments on the briefness of the human experience as well in Psalm 90. His sincere prayer was for the ability to live in the light of eternity with a mindset that never gets too comfortable here on this earth. "Teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom" (Psalm 90:12, NIV).

Having a heart of godly wisdom means we can't forget that the things we see now are temporary and the things we don't see—or rather see by faith—are the things that are permanent and eternal. Life is brief; heaven is forever. Live wisely with heaven in mind, because, as Pastor Ben said, this world and everything in it is "future ashes!"

Jay C. Warren
Executive/Ministerial

Hawaii Conference of Seventh-day Adventists

2728 PALI HWY., HONOLULU, HI 96817
808-595-7591 • frontdesk@hawaiisda.com • www.hawaiisda.com

