



MĀNOA VALLEY
CHURCH

Mānoa Connection

Connecting our ‘ohana

eNewsletter

Message from Pastor Abe

May 6, 2026

“Listening Together for the Next Chapter”



Pastor Abe

One of the gifts and responsibilities of being a United Church of Christ congregation is that we are congregationalist. That word can sound a little formal, but at its heart it means something very simple and beautiful: we believe Jesus gathers real people in a real place, at a real moment in history, to listen, pray, discern, and make decisions together for His glory and His Kingdom purposes.

Congregationalism does not mean everyone gets their own way. It does not mean the loudest voice wins. It does not mean we are disconnected from the wider Body of Christ. As a UCC church, we walk in covenant with the O’ahu Association, the Hawai’i Conference, the General Synod, and other churches.

But it does mean that the responsibility for the life, mission, leadership, and direction of Mānoa Valley Church belongs, in a very real way, to us. Not to a few people in a faraway office. Not to a people who have been labeled as “experts” in some back room. To the people who gather as a church family on Sundays and throughout the week, here at 2728 Huapala Street.

That is both a gift and a calling.

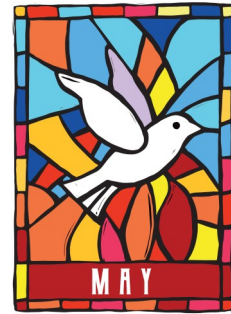
This Saturday, May 9, our annual Leadership Retreat will be held. The main topic of our time together will be our church’s polity and governance for the next chapter of MVC’s life.

I am fully aware that “polity and governance” may not be the phrase that makes your soul leap. It probably was not the thing you were hoping to reflect on during your morning coffee.



But beneath those words is something deeply spiritual.

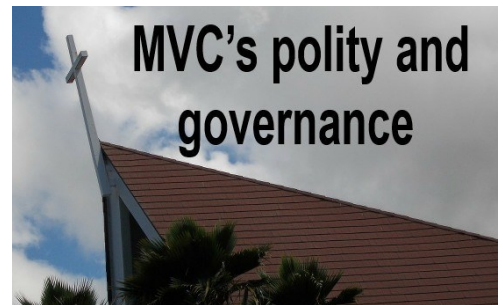
How do we order our life together so that we can be faithful to Jesus? How do we care well for one another? How do we make wise decisions? How do we create room for people to use their gifts without weighing them down? How do we organize ourselves so that our structure serves Jesus Christ’s mission for Mānoa Valley Church instead of slowly draining energy from it?

Our current structure has served MVC well for many years. It has helped us value broad participation, shared responsibility, and meaningful lay leadership. It reflects a church where many people have given their time, wisdom, energy, prayers, and love to help this community flourish.



Links

- [Online Donations](#)
- [Thought For The Day](#)
-  [Like on Facebook](#)
-  [Follow on Instagram](#)



At the same time, our current model asks a great deal of the congregation.

Right now, we elect an Executive Committee of six people, a Church Council made up of representatives from fifteen committees, and three to four members for each of those committees. Those committees include Child Care, Aloha Programs, Communications, Missions, Peace & Justice, Worship Planning, Christian Education, Finance, Trustees, Nominating, Personnel, Sisters and Brothers in Christ, Senior Ministry, Deacons, and Pastor Relations.

To fill the full slate each year, we need somewhere around 52 to 67 elected leaders, assuming people are not serving in multiple roles.

That is a lot of people. A lot of meetings. A lot of scheduling. A lot of reports. And to be clear, also a lot of faithful love.

The question is not whether that structure is good. It is. It helped carry MVC through important seasons.

The question is whether the structure that carried us faithfully in one season is the same structure that will best help us follow Jesus in the next.

This is not a crisis. But it is a moment we should not ignore.

MVC is not alone in this. Many churches are asking similar questions. A generation of faithful leaders who have served the church for decades is beginning to step back from formal leadership. Many younger adults and families live with different rhythms, pressures, and assumptions than previous generations. For many people today, church is no longer assumed to be part of ordinary life in the way it may have been ten, twenty, or forty years ago.

And yet, God is clearly still at work among us.

You may have noticed it on Sunday mornings, especially during the Children's Moments, when the front of the sanctuary is becoming more crowded with our younger members. You may have noticed new families, younger adults, longtime members, preschool families, returning friends, and spiritually-curious people finding their way into our life together.

So, the question before us is not simply, "How do we get enough people to fill committee slots?"

I believe the question is: "What kind of shared life and leadership will help us be faithful, healthy, prayerful, and present to God's work in this season?"

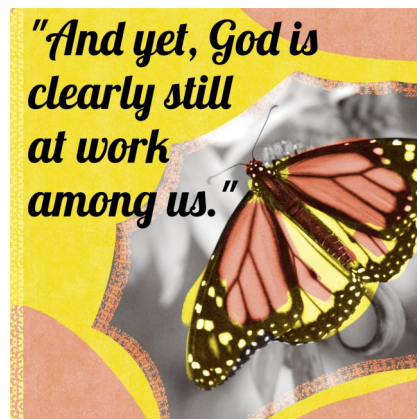
At the retreat, the Council will begin discussing several possible models for how MVC might organize its governance and ministry life in the future. No decision will be made at the retreat. This is the beginning of an important conversation, not the end of one.

In the coming weeks and months, there will be time for leadership to share what was discussed, and there will be opportunities for the congregation to listen, ask questions, offer wisdom, and participate in the discernment.

For now, I want to humbly ask you to pray.

Pray for our Council as we meet. Pray for humility, courage, imagination, honesty, and love. Pray that we would honor the faithful work of those who came before us without being afraid to ask what faithfulness requires of us now.

Pray that we would not be driven by anxiety, nostalgia, convenience, or fear, but by a genuine desire to follow Jesus.



And pray for yourself, too. Whether you are a member, a friend, or someone who calls MVC home, ask God what He may be inviting us into together. Ask what kind of church MVC is being called to become in this next chapter. Ask what kind of leadership, participation, and shared responsibility will help us live more fully as the Body of Christ.

And most personally, ask Jesus how He is calling you to participate in what He is already doing among us.

Congregational life is not always glamorous. Sometimes it looks like agendas, bylaws, budgets, meetings, and committees. But at its best, beneath all of that, it is a people gathered around Jesus, listening for His voice, and saying together: “Lord, lead us. Shape us. Make us faithful. We are yours.”

In Christ, Abe

Message from Pastor Ruchama



Pastor Ruchama

Aloha Mānoa Valley Church family,

As this is my first time writing for the newsletter, I'd like to reintroduce myself. My name is Ruchama Joël and I am the Pastor of Discipleship and Community Life. In these first couple of months serving among you, I've been deeply encouraged by your kindness, your faith, and the way you care for one another. It has been a joy to begin getting to know this church family. Thank you for welcoming me so warmly.

Over the years, I've had many conversations about discipleship with pastors and leaders, and the more I learn, the more I realize discipleship cannot be boxed and mastered in a program. Discipleship is a life-long journey of learning to follow Jesus and help others follow Him too.

I want to start with thinking about the word ‘disciple.’ What is a disciple? In the first century, the Greek word *mathētēs* had a richer and more relational meaning than the modern English word “disciple” or “student.” A disciple isn't only someone who learns information about Jesus, but someone who lets Him gently reshape every part of their life over time.

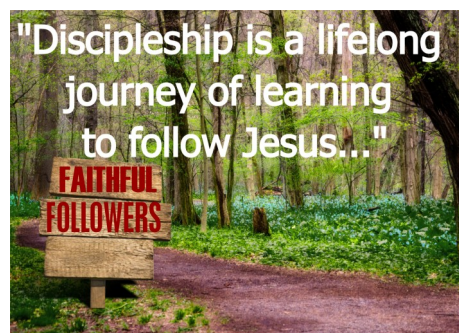
As followers of Christ, you and I are called to make disciples of others. This calling was never meant to be transactional, as if we simply pass along Bible verses so to speak. It's deeply relational. In the Great Commission Jesus says to teach people to obey all that He has commanded. The word “obey” can be difficult for us. In our culture, it is often tied to dominance or even oppression. In Scripture, obedience is not about God trying to control us. It is the loving response of trust. We obey because we are learning that God is good, Jesus is Lord, and His way leads to life.

I believe this all starts with knowing God. From the very beginning, my prayer has been that MVC would continue to be a place where people truly encounter God and are meaningfully connected with one another in fellowship. Not just on Sundays, but throughout the week as well. It starts with you and me learning more about God and growing in our love for Him.

I feel blessed and excited to help create these spaces by offering my passion for the Bible, prayer, worship, and building community. At the same time, discipleship and community life involve far more than what any one person can bring, and that is the beauty of the Great Commission. We are all invited, each with our own gifts and passions, to grow as disciples of Jesus. From a place of personal and intimate relationship with Him, we are then able to invite others to trust and love Him too. Let us be a church of disciples who make disciples, who in turn make disciples.

May He continue to shape us into a community that reflects His love and multiplies His life in others.

In His love, Ruchama Joël



Prayer Gatherings

We are in the process of launching regular prayer gatherings, which will be open to everyone. Whether you're new to prayer or have been praying for years, you are invited to join. If you are interested in participating, please email ruchama@manoavalleychurch.org. This will help with planning and organizing these gatherings. In the coming weeks, more details will be shared as we move forward with the launch.



MISSIONS Moments

Message from Pastor EJ



Pastor EJ

Over the past few weeks, a group of about 15–20 people have been having important conversations about mission and outreach here at Mānoa Valley Church. Together, we have had a good time learning, listening, and reflecting on the mission of the church, the relationship between evangelism and justice, the meaning of conversion, and finally the question, “Now what?”

That last question is important, but it is not one we answer once and then move forward. In many ways, “Now what?” is a perpetual question for the church. Faithful discernment is always paying attention to the past, the present, and the future. We remember the stories, gifts, relationships, and commitments that have already shaped Mānoa Valley Church. We give thanks for the faithful ministry that is already happening among us. And rather than starting from scratch or setting aside what has come before, we are seeking to build on what God has already planted here. At the center of all of this is our call to love our neighbors and seek the common good. Mission is not simply about starting new programs or filling a calendar. It is about participating in what God is already doing in the world, including the work God is already doing through this church. It is about asking how the good news of Jesus Christ continues to take shape in word and deed, in mercy and justice, in worship and service.



More conversations will be held in the future, but for now, this first segment will conclude with a tour of the many different sites connected to the **Institute for Human Services this Friday, May 8, beginning at 9:00 a.m.** Please let me know if you would like to come, even if you were unable to attend the classes. IHS is already doing meaningful and comprehensive work among our houseless neighbors and vulnerable communities across O‘ahu. By visiting their sites, we hope to gain a better glimpse of what a community partner like IHS is already doing, where the needs are, and how MVC might faithfully come alongside them. My hope is that this tour will do more than give us information. I hope it will deepen our compassion, expand our vision, and help us listen more carefully for God’s invitation. We are not trying to do everything, and we are not trying to replace the faithful work already happening. We are trying to discern faithful, realistic, and sustainable next steps as God continues forming us into a church that bears witness to Christ’s love for the sake of our neighbors and the common good.

Mahalo! –Pastor EJ

Family Promise Dinner Donations



We will be taking dinner to the parents and children at Family Promise of Hawai‘i on Young Street on Thursday 5/28. If you would like to donate a dish, some fruits, veggies, rice or dessert, please sign up using this [MAY 28 SIGN UP LINK](#). or text/call **Inga Park Okuna** at 808-258-3781 The food is served all together buffet style. Bring your donation to the church parking lot between 5:00 and 5:15 pm on 5/28. Thank you to all who have helped MVC share God’s radical hospitality!

UCC Peace and Justice Issues

Here are some of the recent issues being addressed by the United Church of Christ:

- Tell Congress to oppose funding the war in Iran: [LEARN MORE](#)
- In remembrance of the 111th anniversary of the Armenian Genocide in which 1.5 Armenians were systematically killed and displaced, Churches for Middle East Peace (CMEP) joins with communities worldwide to honor their memory and stand with their descendants for truth, justice and the dignity of all. [LEARN MORE](#)
- The Ongoing Nakba and Prospects for Peace and Justice for Palestinians invite you to join a webinar led by Jonathan Kuttab who will discuss the war and efforts for peace. [LEARN MORE](#)



Strengthen the Church



**Strengthen
the Church**

Mānoa Valley Church will participate in the Strengthen the Church (STC) special mission offering of the United Church of Christ on May 24. These gifts are shared by local congregations to support leadership development, new churches, youth ministry and new ideas in existing congregations. Please write your check to Mānoa Valley Church with "STC" on the memo line. Thank you for your participation.

Easter Celebration at MVC



Date	Event
May 8	Visit IHS facilities. 9:00 am, church parking lot. See article on page 4.
May 9	Leadership Retreat, 9 am—1 pm. See Pastor Abe's Message
May 24	Pentecost Sunday
May 24	Strengthen the Church offering will be received
May 25	Memorial Day—Office closed
May 28	Family Promise dinner donations, 5:00 –5:15 pm, church parking lot
May 30	e-Newsletter article deadline
May 31	Peace and Justice and Missions Committee to provide snacks