

Churches: Our Everyday Superheroes

Stories of Hope and Inspiration from Our Churches Across the Country

Kaumakapili Church in Honolulu, Hawaii

Kaumakapili Church was founded in 1838 for the maka'ainana, or common people. The church has a long history of outreach ministry that began in 1975. A fire in the area left many homeless and Kaumakapili took them in and later established a Food Pantry and Free Store where people could get canned goods, clothing and household items. This progressed to an agreement with the Hawaii Food Bank that allowed the church to distribute up to 500 bags of food each month. With increasing numbers of homeless persons in the neighborhood, a special day was designated for them.



In 2018, a returning church member, Eugene Muratsuka, began to bring his truck that was adapted to create a kind of roll-out kitchen with a propane stove that allowed them to add a hot breakfast service and an invitation to linger for conversation. Eugene planted the seed to allow other church members to get involved with the hot breakfast service. Getting to know our homeless visitors as individuals created other possibilities for the Outreach Ministry to serve the community. The church was awarded a Neighbors in Need grant to offer Kuka Kuka to homeless persons, a “talk story” spiritual intervention using Hawaiian cultural metaphors. They were all set to start in May, 2020.

Unfortunately, COVID 19 hit the islands. Their neighborhood became the zip code with the highest percent of cases in the state. At the same time, the unemployment rate in Hawai'i was the highest in the nation. They had to close the sanctuary as well as suspend the Food Pantry, Free Store and hot breakfast wagon. Crisis brings opportunity, and so they adapted to the new requirements for social distancing. A new location was found on the Windward side at a homeless kauhale (village) with an outdoor setting for social distancing.

In Eugene's words, “During quiet time, these words suddenly came to my mind...Set my People Free. Of course, I was taken by complete surprise because of the magnitude of what was being asked of me. When I sat down at service, I was further surprised that the Scripture that morning was from Isaiah 61:1-3. I took the words as

confirmation to start the Houseless Outreach Ministry. It felt great to be an instrument of God in His work with the needy.”

Working with the homeless can sometimes be difficult.

According to Eugene, “It is a much more challenging ministry because a person needs to open their heart. This action will come at a cost to the giver because there will be hurt when one chooses to serve the needy with an open heart. It also requires passion and compassion from the servant and God provides the rest. God is the only One who can teach us how to truly love in the way that He does and our obedience in joining Him in His work is the beginning.”

Eugene's ministry has grown to include 2 additional church members who have been able to gain the trust of visitors and help them with much more than food. Donations from church members and friends of the church have allowed the ministry to spread God's love to those most in need. A member of the Outreach Ministry takes his pickup truck filled with bags of food and distributes this while remaining safe in the cab of his truck to collect information required by the Hawaii Food Bank. Using Community Mission funds, the church provided supermarket gift cards to people in need. By adapting to the restrictions required during the pandemic, the Outreach Ministry has been able to continue its mission to extend the reach of Christ by partnering with the community for positive change. Kaumakapili church says, “Mahalo, Uncle Eugene, and thank you for all you do!”

Submitted by Ann Leake

Words To Live By (By Mother Teresa) Guides Eugene's ministry
At the end of life we will not be judged by how many diplomas we have received, how much money we have made, how many things we have done.

We will be judged by “I was hungry and you gave me to eat. I was naked and you clothed me. I was homeless and you took me in.”

Hungry not only for bread, but hungry for love. Naked not only for clothing, but naked for human dignity and respect. Homeless not only for want of a room of brick, but homeless because of rejection.