



Mānoa Connection

MĀNOA VALLEY
CHURCH

Connecting our 'ohana

eNewsletter

January 7, 2026

Happy New Year ▶ Happy New Year ▶ Happy New Year

Pastor Abe's Message

“Christmas Isn’t Over”



It's early January, and by now, most of us have moved on from Christmas. The decorations are packed away and the house looks "normal" again. We've slid back to our regular routines, and the rest of the world has returned to the next thing. It's understandable—life goes on.

But according to the Gospel writer John, Christmas isn't over. He treats the birth of Jesus as a turning point in reality. "The Word became flesh and lived among us" (John 1:14). At Christmas, God chose not to be abstract. He came close. He stepped into ordinary human life, with real people and real burdens. If that's true, then faith can't stay theoretical. It has to take on flesh in us too, in the difficult but good work of showing up, loving well, and mending what we can.

Last Sunday, Pastor Gwendolyn and our Advent Connection Group invited us to "The Bread Table" where we listened as the group reflected on "The Work of Christmas," a devotion that draws on a poem by Howard Thurman. The devotion put into words what many of us feel: on Christmas Day, we celebrate with our family and friends, but then there is the deeper work that begins when the guests have left, and the dishes are done. The work that looks like good news for the poor, mercy for the suffering, freedom for people who feel stuck, and real hope for people who are tired of pretending they're fine.

When I look back on this past year at MVC, I've witnessed this work happen in our church community, especially in a year when many in our congregation have faced serious health struggles. I've seen our church family deliver meals, leave bags of groceries on doorsteps, offer rides, lift up prayers, sit with others in waiting rooms, send simple texts that let a struggling friend know, "I'm here. You're not alone." Nothing dramatic or flashy. Just faithful love, the kind that costs time and attention. The kind of love that looks a lot like Jesus.

That same spirit reached beyond our church community, too. We've continued to build relationships with families at Keauhou Shelter, caring for friends and neighbors facing food insecurity and housing instability. And you can see it in ministries like Fit4Life, Art for Fun, and MVC's Book Club, just a few of the places where Jesus meets people where they are and where strangers slowly start to feel like friends.

As we begin this new year, our congregation has also taken a step of faith to explore two new pastoral roles: the Pastor of Missions & Community Engagement and the Pastor of Discipleship & Community Life. Please pray for these roles, for the people Jesus is already preparing for them, for the ministries and new opportunities that could grow through them, and for your own discernment about how you might be part of what God is doing.

January

Links

[Online Donations](#)

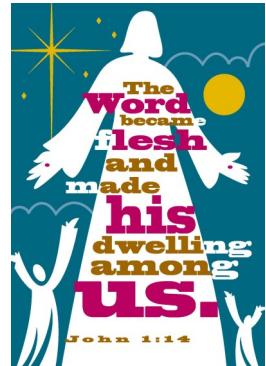
[Thought For The Day](#)



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One thing I'm asking of myself this month, and offering to you too, is this: consider letting your life be a little more open. Join a Connection Group. Say yes to one small way of serving. Connect with a family in our Preschool or After School Care programs. Invite someone to coffee. Have someone over for dinner. It will cost you some convenience, but love usually does. And more often than not, it's these small, unremarkable choices that become the places where God does His quiet work in us and through us, as we sit in waiting rooms, share meals, and talk on the ride home.

As 2026 begins, may the God who came close to us in Jesus meet you at your workplace, in your classroom, at your dinner table. And may He strengthen those of us who are weary, comfort those of us who are grieving, and give us the courage to love each other and the world He so loves.

With love,
Pastor Abe

Moderator's Message by Roger Au



Happy New Year! It's hard to believe that 2025 is over and we look forward to settling into a new season.

Please mark your calendars for a Special Congregational Meeting to be held after worship on **January 18**. An exciting new pilot program was discussed at our last meeting. The initiative focuses on helping people grow as followers of Jesus Christ and will nurture a vibrant missional culture within MVC and the broader community. You approved the intent to explore and hire two pastors for a two-year trial period and we now wish to share additional developments to move forward. Your presence is especially desired, as we are at a significant juncture in the life of our church. We hope to see you on the 18th.



In this new year, we thank **Bette Uyeda** for her heartfelt leadership as Moderator over the past two years. She was the glue that held us together! Over the years, Bette has also served as the Council Secretary and in many other roles.

158 Grateful Hearts



Diane Terada, Division Administrator for Community and Senior Services, Catholic Charities, and **Alisa Au**.

The Mānoa Valley Church congregation brightened the lives of many senior citizens this Christmas by their generosity. They donated gift cards and money and supported the Art Connection Group's fund-raising efforts by buying stationery they produced. The end result was 158 gift cards presented to the kūpuna receiving services through the Waikiki Community Center and Catholic Charities.

Gift cards from Longs, Target, Safeway, California Pizza Kitchen, and many other places were placed in attractive Christmas cards decorated by our Preschool and After School Care children. These offerings made such wonderful gifts for the kūpuna.

Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. (NIV) 2 Corinthians 9.7.

The Missions Committee thanks you for spreading the message of the miracle of Jesus and God's love through your Christmas generosity.



Caroline Hayashi, President, Waikiki Community Center and **Evie Gallagher**

“How Easily the Conversation Flowed”



Pastor Abe, Pastor Gwendolyn Kirkland and Anita Motte

Thanks to a heartfelt effort and generous donation of her time, **Pastor Gwendolyn Kirkland** led an amazing connection group based on Advent that stretched from mid-December to early January. Participants read daily devotionals from a 2025 collection called “Soon and Very Soon” published by the United Church of Christ and then met for six Fridays on Zoom to discuss them.

These readings traced the period of Advent to Christmastide and were based on scripture selected by various authors, who then offered their

interpretations--sometimes “avant garde” as Pastor Gwendolyn noted--that asked the reader to “dig into Scripture and uncover different layers.” As complex as this may sound, it was a completely natural process and as the facilitator, Pastor Gwendolyn was impressed by how easily the conversations flowed.

Participants were equally enthusiastic about the learning that took place and the camaraderie the sessions nurtured. **Anita Motte** and **Deloris Hairston** enjoyed hearing from others and seeing the scripture through different lens. For Anita, hearing another person’s interpretation helped her make a connection with the author’s text and Deloris pointed out the power of the freedom to state your mind. **Richelle Fujioka** concurred, saying that these sessions taught her how to approach Scripture with an open mind and greater curiosity. To describe her experience in this devotional group, **Mary Moccia** found a passage that ironically characterizes a person’s journey into a desert. *“The wilderness is sacred ground. It clears distractions. It stretches perspective. It sharpens our awareness. It readies our hearts. It refines our attention. It deepens our discernment.”* (December 16, Phiwa Langeni)



Richelle Fujioka, Deloris Hairston and Mary Moccia

The group participated in “Our Story Sunday” worship on January 4th ([LINK](#) to the video recording provided here) and has one more meeting on Zoom to round out the experience. This devotional connection group is a testament to the power of reading scripture, listening to various interpretations, and most importantly, supporting each other in our faith journeys.

Annual Christmas High Tea Hosted by the Senior Ministry

This festive gathering on December 8 featured finger food, sandwiches and sweet treats. It was a charming way to enjoy holiday treats with MVC members and friends.



Child Care Programs Celebrate Christmas



Dora and Ying
Zhang enjoyed the
Trolley Ride



Journey to The Son, Sunday School students, sang during the worship service.

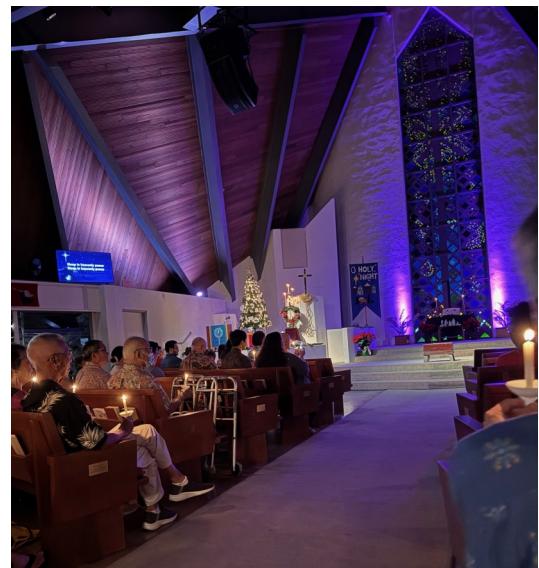
Mānoa Community Christmas Parade

On December 7, MVC members, friends and Child Care students participated in the festive parade.



Our Annual Candlelight Service

Jesus's birth was celebrated at the annual Candlelight Service. The program featured Scripture, carols and the symbolic lighting of candles to represent Christ as the "Light of the World."



Keauhou Shelter Sandwich-making

Keauhou ("a new beginning") Shelter provides rooms for homeless or at-risk individuals and couples.



Members and friends assembled sandwiches.



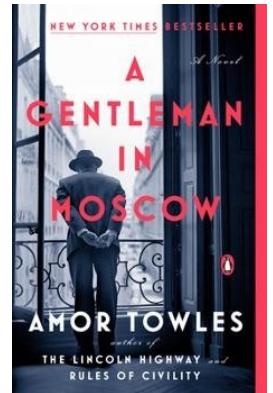
Student-designed sandwich bags.



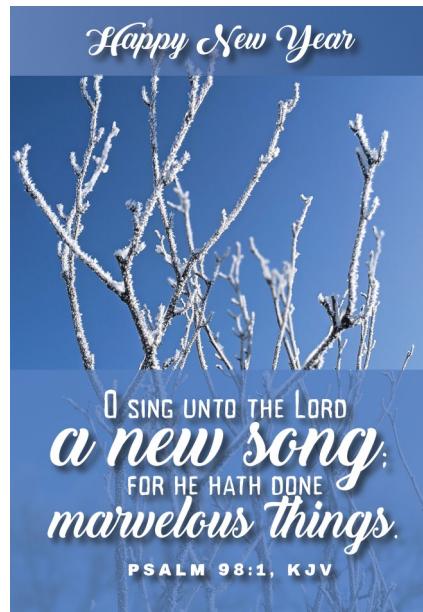
Inga Park Okuna, Neil Okuna, Sue Yamamoto and Jonette, a Keauhou Shelter staff member.

Book Club Invites You to Join Us!

The current book choice takes the reader to Russia during the Bolshevik Revolution in 1922 and in a smartly-crafted story, tells the (fictitious) tale of one member of the dethroned aristocracy who strives to preserve his lifestyle and dignity while under house arrest. The book is called *A Gentleman in Moscow*, written by Amor Towles. One online source says: "The book was a major bestseller, praised by critics and readers for its style, wit, and memorable characters, and was recommended by figures like Bill Gates and Barack Obama. The novel is praised for its charm, humor, and exploration of resilience, friendship, and the human spirit."



It's available through the Hawaii State public library. The book club's next planned meeting to discuss this work is Sunday, January 25, 2026 after worship in the Upper Room. If you'd like to join us, you can come in-person or on Zoom. Contact Dianne Ishida at dianne@hawaii.edu.



Date	Event
January 9	"Soon & Very Soon: 2025 Advent Devotional" 12 pm-12:45 pm. Led by Pastor Gwendolyn. Contact the church office at 808-988-3272 for more information.
January 18	Special Congregational Meeting, after worship
January 18	Keauhou Shelter sandwich-making, breezeway
January 19	Martin Luther King Jr. Day, office is closed
January 25	Book Club meeting, after worship, Upper Room or on Zoom
January 25	Communication Committee provides snacks