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UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

Communitas

PENNSYLVANIA SOUTHEAST CONFERENCE

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Communitas is prepared 10 days prior to the Sunday of its publication. Often times, this makes sharing some stories not relevant as the "best time for sharing" has passed. In this particular case, I felt it was still worth sharing. The people in Maui will need our help for a very long time.

Dear Friends,
We live in unity with UCC friends in the 117 congregations that make up the Hawaii Conference. Four of those congregations are on Maui. While the island is 4,800 miles away, the suffering there is as close as a next breath or tear. Conference Minister David Popham shared the following thoughts August 11. The latest news on how to help follows that.

Pastor Bill
Rev. Bill Worley, PSE Conference Minister

From the Conference Minister of the Hawaii Conference UCC

How good and pleasant it is when God's people live together in unity! Psalm 133: 1

"Once again, thank you all for your kind words, prayers, and holding us in the light of God. Many of you have been through disasters before and I appreciate your insights and hard-earned wisdom.

…the fire has become the worst natural disaster for the islands since becoming a state. The Hilo tsunami of 1960 killed 61 people, Hawaii's deadliest disaster. The death toll for Lahaina is now 67 [96 as of today, Tuesday, 8/15]. Authorities are letting residents back in. But it's over a dirt road that runs along cliffs. On top of that once you get in there is no electricity, water, or phone service. A few hearty folks are remaining in town. 80% of the town of Lahaina (1700 buildings) were destroyed or damaged.

Waiola UCC, the first church on Maui, is the 200-year-old home to Christian friends who have rebuilt their building in part or whole four times: 1858 following wind damage; 1894 following an accidental fire started by the caretaker; 1947 following a rubbish fire; 1951 following wind damage. This congregation's DNA is resiliency. Their church campus did burn. The concrete walls of the sanctuary remain. Interestingly the front lawn and historic cemetery were not touched by the fire…All members of the church have been accounted for except for one couple [no update about them was available at the time of this publication]. All totaled, four UCC churches were under threat by the fires.

Along with what's being carried in the news, Maui regularly has brush fires this time of year. It is the midst of our dry season and August heat does not help. On Tuesday [August 8] multiple brushfires broke out across Maui, the four large ones and I've heard about five small ones as well. Living on islands, we cannot call in the fire brigade from the next county over. The fire above Lahaina had been contained and was all but extinguished when the winds picked up - 60 to 80 miles-per-hour gusts. The fires broke out and thinly stretched personnel could not keep up with them.

The magnitude and longevity of recovery is just now becoming a reality for our Maui clergy. The adrenaline rush is fading and grief and a sense of being over-whelmed is on the rise. Pacific Island culture is about pulling together and that is happening across the neighboring islands, but access to Maui is limited to essential workers and residents and much of "pulling together" means "presence" for our folks. I am not sure how this will play itself out.

I will be on Maui on Tuesday [August 15] as part of an ecumenical prayer service. The Catholic Bishop got that declared an essential activity. Woot! Woot! Bisho Silva.

Mahalo for all the kind words and prayers.

Rev. David Popham
Conference Minister
Hawaii Conference, UCC

There are multiple ways to contribute to the response.
We recommend:

Donate to UCC Disaster Ministries through the Conference Office. You can either mail contributions to the office (1441 Laura Lane, Suite 100; Pottstown, PA 19464) and indicate "Hawaii wildfire relief" or through the **Donation** button on our website (indicate the amount under "OCWM
Special Support - Wider Church" next to "Wider Disaster Relief for:" and indicate "Hawaii wildfire relief" in the space to the right.

Gifts can also be made specifically to help rebuild Waiola UCC. Those gifts can be sent to the Conference Office as noted above, but must specify "Waiola UCC" or they will be forwarded for the general Hawaii Wildfire Relief Fund.