

A Day of Witness and Summons

By Eric Anderson

Delegates to the 2017 General Synod of the United Church of Christ heard from the Rev. Traci Blackmon, our denomination's dynamic nominee to lead Justice and Witness Ministries; from Glennon Doyle, author of *Love Warrior*; and from General Minister and President the Rev. John Dorhauer. A few committees will continue their work on Sunday morning, but most turned to refreshment of the mind and spirit from the speakers and from workshops. The day closed with the musical voice and challenging commission of the Rev. William Barber, founder of the Moral Mondays movement, who spoke to a packed Gala audience.

Two among Hawai'i's delegation took on additional labors. Pualani Akaka and Naleen Andrade are both Members in Discernment, following a path toward authorization as ministers in the United Church of Christ. Both participated in UCC history and polity classes this week, and have followed the business of General Synod as honored visitors.

Naleen Andrade has written a first-hand account of her experiences at Synod, while Pualani Akaka, a member of Hoolehua Congregational Church UCC on Molokai, shared her impressions in an interview shortly after hearing Rev. Barber speak. Her voice sighed with wonder.

"There are good men here, and good women," she said with emphasis. "These are Jesus' children working for his kingdom."

Akaka had spent over 25 years as a public school teacher, a vocation which sometimes left her feeling isolated. She described attending conferences where nothing connected the attendees but their love for children. At General Synod, she found a connection with people who love Jesus.

"This is the United Church of Christ. This is crazy. It makes no sense to have this diversity," she said. "And it is its life."

General Minister and President the Rev. John Dorhauer summoned the denomination to leave behind its customary reluctance to sound its trumpet, urging its leaders in all settings to end the UCC's role as one "of the best-kept secrets out there." He celebrated the vision and mission statements recently announced by the United Church Board, which promise to give direction and inspiration to the church and its membership.

The Purpose Statement is drawn from a passage in Matthew's Gospel: To love God with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength and our neighbor as ourselves.

The Mission Statement: United in Spirit and inspired by God's grace, we welcome all, love all, and seek justice for all.

The Vision: United in Christ's love, a just world for all.

The UCC will embark this year on a Three Great Loves campaign. Dorhauer urged local churches to create, identify, share, and celebrate their ministries which embody these great “three loves” of the church: love of children, love of neighbor, and love of creation. If we do not love creation, he warned, it will become impossible to love children or neighbor.

The United Church of Christ honored youth who had been Water Protectors in the Standing Rock Sioux’s struggle to prevent the Dakota Access Pipeline from violating sacred lands and imperiling the people’s water supply. The house stood and cheered as the young people accepted their awards, their arms raised in salute to their quest and in assertion of their rights.

On Sunday, some delegates will rejoin their committees to complete their tasks before business returns to the full body in the evening. Three thousand are expected to join in worship, at which Rev. Dorhauer will preach.

For more on the day’s events, read Naleen Andrade’s account on the Hawai’i Conference [website](#) and visit ucc.org/news.