

A CUP OF COLD WATER: FOR THE “COMMON GOOD”

Cindy Schumacher

This past August, A Cup of Cold Water (ACCW) held its 2nd annual gathering at Trinity-by-the-Sea Episcopal Church in Kihei to give thanks for the success of its outreach ministry. In late 2012 the four Episcopal Churches on Maui, Good Shepherd, Holy Innocents, St. John’s and Trinity-by-the-Sea, worked on a vision — a vision right from the Gospel of Jesus — to serve the growing homeless population on this island.

Spearheaded by ACCW Founder and President Keku Akana, it began with a small group of Episcopalians and a few friends. With a blessing and joyful send-off from Trinity Church, the ACCW care-van took to the road on October 13th, 2013. Therefore, it was with a great sense of privilege that Trinity welcomed almost 80 volunteers and many friends to the 2nd Annual Pa’ina Celebration.

“We gave thanks to the powerful ways in which God has sustained and grown this ministry for almost two years on the road,” said Rev. Austin Murray of Trinity-by-the-Sea. “On our journey the Gospels constantly remind us that Jesus spent most of his time with the poor and downcast. Inspired by his example, the vision took shape: support and minister to the homeless in a very basic way, a cup of cold water given in love.”

ACCW is a shining example of how Christian efforts can bring religious convictions into the public arena and use them to serve the common good. The program, via the care-van, distributes food, clothing and essential hygiene to the poor and homeless throughout the island.

“In these months we’ve learned not to underestimate the power of such a simple gesture, a gesture of love, caring and solidarity that heals and restores human dignity battered by what at times seems like a cruel, uncaring world, not to mention the impact of bad decisions, bad luck, and bad economy,” Rev. Murray explained.

“As Christians, we are called to an active faith, not a passive one,” added Rev. Kerith Harding of St. John’s Kula. “Participation in ACCW care van ministry ensures that those of us who are fortunate enough to have housing are not resting comfortable from afar, but that we are working to bring comfort and to show love to our neighbors who don’t have permanent lodging.”

“Our partnerships with the four Episcopal churches on Maui and with our other ecumenical, interfaith and community partners echo Paul’s words to the Galatians, ‘In Christ there is no longer Jew nor Greek, no longer slave nor free, no longer male nor female.’ What really matters is justice, love and peace. What matters is the common good!”

Rev. Harding shared her personal prayer. “It’s my hope and dream that as people of faith we can come together to make it so that none of God’s children goes hungry, none is homeless and all are treated with dignity and respect. Let’s work ACCW out of a job!”

“Each week we make three runs with our van to different parts of Maui,” said volunteer Paula Baldwin. “As one of those volunteers and a member of the ACCW Board of Directors, I am continually thankful and amazed at the gifts people give us so that we can share the gift of basic needs to the children of God having a hard time on Maui.”

“We continue in our humble mission to deliver water, nutrition, clothing and comfort, averaging 600-700 homeless men, women and children a month,” said Akana. “ACCW is first and foremost a spiritual mission. So although we need numbers and stats, our most important program measure is that we serve, love, listen, touch, smile, pray and offer hope to our fellow neighbors in need.”

Akana believes that mission outreach is foundational in the formation of our spiritual lives. “Outreach is a spiritual boomerang that echoes back into our own souls and consciousness, reminding us that anyone of us could be that person in need,” he said. “Homelessness on Maui is increasing, not diminishing.”

“ACCW is a mission that directs us away from our physical church to the streets,” Akana continued. “We find the incarnate Christ in the bodies of the neglected, addicted, lonely, mentally ill, depressed, voiceless and the poor.”

“During this time ACCW has attracted support from willing volunteers from other Christian churches, from a variety of community organizations and from other faiths,” noted Rev. Murray. “It was with particular joy at our 2nd Annual Pa’ina Celebration that we welcomed and prayed with our Buddhist brothers and sisters under the leadership of Rev. Richard Tennes from Kahului Hongwanji Mission.”

“We are grateful for our participation in ACCW,” said Rev. Tennes. Recalling the effect of Akana’s first visit to the Kahului Temple he said, “He also brought the care-van so we could all take a look at it. Everyone was quite impressed and it was not long afterward that individuals and groups within the Temple wanted to help out by making sandwiches, as well as with donations of items recommended by Akana.”

“The emergence of ACCW within the local Maui Episcopal Churches is a testament to the abundant compassion and love within their faith community,” said Rev. Tennes. “They have been an example for us to pay more attention to our own responsibility to serve the needs of those who are suffering and in need.”

Rev. Tennes gave witness to the meaning of the common good. “As Buddhists, our emphasis is not so much on doctrine or belief but on the living expressions of the great reality that is beyond our limited understanding. In the case of ACCW, it seems to me that though we may all use different words to express our faith, our actions in trying to serve others speak much more clearly.”

“Through the blessing of God this simple ministry seems to have plugged into a generous humanitarian spirit in our community, one that knows no barrier of race, religion or culture,” Rev. Murray added. “We praise God for what has been achieved in His Name and in His Name pray for continued determination to serve the least of our brothers and sisters.”

Akana summarized. “We realize these simple acts of ‘no strings attached aloha’ are more necessary than ever. We cannot help everyone, but we can help someone,” he said. “We are not here to solve poverty, we are here to comfort while we look for ways to minimize poverty.”

For more information, to help, or to donate to ACCW, contact Keku Akana or Mary Lou Mellinger at Good Shepherd Church (808) 419-1637. Email: www.acupofcoldwatermaui@gmail.com.