

(11) Into the New Millennium

The new millennium brought marked changes to Hawaii and to the Aiea area. Truly the American century was upon Aiea. In came the mega stores, the Wall Marts, K Marts, Home Depots, Best Buys and Targets. Out went the smaller retailers; and any resemblance to the mom and pop days was gone forever. Even the familiar corner eateries were replaced with the chains like Subway, Jamba Juice, and Starbucks. Aiea looked like any American populated stretch where an old town center (in this case a plantation camp) had been overrun by deep retail-consumer establishments.

Even the local church scene took on the look and feel of the times. The little country churches on the edge of town were replaced with TV churches, fellowship and worship centers, and the multi-service church meeting in large auditoriums. The mega church with its polished praise teams grew in leaps and bounds. It appeared that the church of this age needed air time to market itself. It seemed a message that brought the power of God into daily situations and relationships met the inner need of this stress-laden millennium.

For the first time in its history it might be said that the Aiea SDA church sought to find a niche within the competing forces of the religious scene. Aiea at times tried what the Hawaii Conference was promoting—namely “retro-60’s evangelism” gaining inspiration from holding crusades in third world countries, and “small group ministries,” a page out of the mega church models. At other times Aiea would hold support ministries for disadvantaged groups, trying it appeared to do what some of the mega churches did with their paid professionals. Aiea’s choir and Pathfinders though still very good, no longer dominated the life and pulse of the church.

Yet Aiea still did what it had always done, ministry to children and music ministry with a unique excellence. The Vacation Bible School in a modern format was resurrected under the leadership of the Sewells (Geoff and Esther). Summer youth pastors were hired for the first time. The praise time just before the church service became a children friendly ukulele-based session. The keyboard work and vocals of Pastor and Mrs. Munson added class and richness to the praise time.

As the new millennium rolled along, it would appear that God would use Aiea’s financial solidity (the largest tithe base in Hawaii) to carve out two new “edifices” that involved dollars. Under Pastor Lee Grady (2002-03), a pastor who came out of retirement to pastor Aiea for a one-year term, the church would set in place a scholarship fund to help students attend church school in percentages based on financial need. Some were helped from 10 percent up to nearly 100 percent. Miracles in generosity were seen here. Under Pastor Lloyd Munson (2003-present), the son of evangelist George Munson who helped to start the Aiea church, the church would buy an adjacent property and create a much needed parking facility out of it. Because the project was costly and logistically challenged, there wasn’t an overwhelming consensus, and tension arose. But as the two properties miraculously became linked by the purchase of a “bridge property” making the church grounds and its new parking lot one, most rejoiced at the public blessing in March

of 2006. The scholarship fund will stand as long as the generosity of Aiea's members continues. The parking lot loan was paid of rapidly and with pride.

As we head toward the remainder of the first decade of the new millennium, a relatively small church like Aiea is challenged to find relevancy and an evangelism identity. We are challenged to maintain our financial obligations, and we are challenged not to forget how God has led us in the past. But if our history has taught us anything, it is that God cannot fail, and that the spirit in which something is done is crucial. We may not be the stars of the TV church, or the sought after mega church, but that's OK. The Spirit of God is not a respecter of persons. God is not finished with us yet. We have nothing to fear for the future. The *obakes* have all been drowned in the Sea of Glass. The God of the cane fields and under house, is also the God of cyber space, social media and the concrete jungle. The history of Aiea is not yet complete. If you have committed your life to Christ, you are part of God's Bunch of Kids. And if you read your Bible, you have a dream. Let us always remember what God did, and can still do, with just a bunch of kids, a Bible, and a dream.