

FFWPU USA: Kona Aloha Challenge, a weeklong fishing expedition in Hawaii

Demian Dunkley
January 3, 2024



Photos courtesy of Jennifer Pierce

"The spirit of Hawaii is so unique - it's encompassing, diverse, and colorful, and the people are kind of like that, too," says Jennifer Pierce. "This island has that kind of spirit of reconnecting and healing. It's a great place to fish, but also a great place to connect with God and nature."



It's the second year Pierce is coordinating the "Aloha Challenge," a weeklong fishing expedition that takes participants out for long stretches on the Pacific Ocean, as well as land excursions across the Big Island of Hawaii. The program - which began in 2020 under the leadership of director Chuck Frumin - doubled this year to 10 participants, ages 18 to 36.

"We have Unificationists from across the U.S. - New York, Seattle, Las Vegas, even a local from Honolulu," Pierce says. "One also came from Japan."

Pierce became involved with Aloha Challenge during a time of transition and reflection in her own life. "During a fishing trip in Alaska with Dr. Chung Sik Yong, I wanted to do something new," she recalls. "Hawaii came up while I was on the ocean. It was big and new and scary because I'd never been [to Hawaii] before."



Stepping off the plane, the California native remembers the sheer awe she felt seeing the picturesque landscape for the first time. "It's so impressive," Pierce says. And sharing such an experience with participants, she says, only magnifies the greatness.

"We greet all our participants with Hawaiian leis, and it's very welcoming," Pierce says. "We do a variety of things throughout the program ... and we're really grateful to the participants because they are so excited and willing, with so much energy for these jam-packed days."



From December 28 to January 3, the group spent hours at a time aboard two Good Go boats, taking in the majestic coastline while fishing. "True Parents wanted to train young people with fishing because of the skills and character-building qualities," Pierce says. "We had four full days of fishing ... We're barefoot on the boat, getting comfortable and taking in a birds-eye view of the island and this beautiful expanse."



"This year, unfortunately, we didn't catch any big fish like ahi tuna," she continues. "Fishing in Hawaii isn't guaranteed - you really have to work for it and know the right spots."

For participants, however, the tranquil atmosphere of their surroundings mattered most. "It was interesting to see how my inner state seemed to reflect in the fish I tried to catch," recalls one participant. "I feel like I experienced the paradise that God originally envisioned, touching the beautiful nature. While interacting with the sea and animals, I also felt the liberation of my heart and the act of forgiving myself."



Similarly, other participants noticed a profound "healing power" wash over them. "I really have a lot more appreciation for fishing and fishermen; it's like I discovered another world," says another participant. "The island is a very special place, providentially and spiritually. I think it's a healing place for the world - or could be anyway. People can come together here. True Parents have a beautiful legacy here."

The group, who stayed at the local church property, saw firsthand True Parents' investment in the Kona coffee farm they developed and the surrounding lush gardens. An island tour included more scenic terrain including Waipio Valley and Akaka Falls.



"There's a lot of wildlife around ... wild animals like pigs and mongoose on the island," Pierce says. "Even though the Big Island is sparsely populated, you're surrounded by beautiful mountains, volcanoes, and the ocean. It's a great place to step back and reflect, and also bond with cool people while doing some fun stuff."

Whether stargazing, or listening to heartfelt testimonies from local elder Unificationists, the program encapsulated a much-needed reprieve - and recharge - from everyday life. "After hearing all the testimonies and our group discussions, I once again realized how much Reverend Moon did for the world and for the youth," one participant says. "I learned the importance of the ocean in bringing world peace, and how much opportunity there is [in Hawaii]. My appreciation for nature grew, and my understanding of my own beliefs strengthened."

As for Pierce, she's thankful for Frumin's leadership and vision as the program's director, and the hard work of staff, including co-coordinator Tamae Seto, as well as all the participants. "For me, it's really rewarding to do this," Pierce says. "Hawaii feels like it's almost a second home. My hope is that I can spend more time here in the future, and maybe do more 'Aloha Challenges' throughout the year."

Do you have a story idea you'd like to share from your community? You can submit it to info@unification.org.

