

Hironaka shares message at *Kīpuni Aloha no Maui* sunset vigil



Rev. Ai Hironaka, at the end of his message, wore a Lahainaluna cap and bowed his head in Gassho. Cindy Ellen Russell / CRUSSELL@STARADVERTISER.COM

The Rev. Ai Hironaka, resident minister of Lahaina Hongwanji Mission, shared the following poetic message for the statewide vigil, *Kīpuni Aloha no Maui- Embrace Beloved Maui* on September 1 in Kā'anapali, Maui.

“Kīpuni Aloha no Mauī” Message for people & friends of Lahaina

The fire destroyed the houses and took everything away.

Many people were killed and many are still missing. I am at a loss for words when I think of the heartache of so many families. I would like to express my deepest condolences to people who lost their loved ones.

People got hurt.
People are still crying.

When I'm alone, tears well up at random moments.
We have absolutely no control over when it comes.

When driving alone,
When I see the smiles of children,
I can't cry when I want to cry, and I feel like crying when I shouldn't.
I gave up on controlling it.
I never thought that a man could cry so much at the age of 46.

Now the same pained people are encouraging and comforting each other at Ross, Target, TJ Maxx, Costco, and more.
Heart-to-heart hugs of those who share the same heartache are stronger than before the fire.

People who know each other's faces in the town of Lahaina, but have never spoken to each other, now they are communicating with and healing each other.
After the fire, Lahaina's community ties are definitely stronger and thicker.

Now we need to see the future.

The white shirt, tie, pants, socks, and shoes I am wearing today are all brand new.

Except underwear...

All of this was purchased with donations from the Honpa Hongwanji Mission of Hawaii and many others.

All the clothes I wear every day dress me up with donations from everyone.

Thank you very much.

Like me, the town of Lahaina will be dressed up with donations from all over the world.

This tie is not a fancy brand, but now I have a special tie that I don't want to burn for the rest of my life. Because behind this simple necktie, the thoughts of many people, not just my wife, are packed.

All my photos from before the iPhone era have been burned. Gone are photos of my children when they were babies, photos of when I was married, and photos of myself when I was a baby too.

Many of you must be as sad as I am.

But folks, the photos taken at your friend's house or shelter right now may be far more valuable than the lost ones.

Casually taken photos at shelter, showing strong ties among family and friends.

Those photos are embraced by the support and help of many people.

These are the most beautiful pictures of family and friends desperately helping each other.

Things that we really don't want to burn – they did not burn – life, human ties, human kindness, All that is still within us.



left: Bishop Toshiyuki Umitani (left) and bishops of the Hawaii Buddhist Council at Kawaiaha'o Church in Honolulu during noon prayer gathering. **right:** Participants at the Thomas Square gathering in Honolulu joining hands and singing "Hawaii Aloha." (Ōlelo Community Media)

It seems like, those who are hurt become more sensitive to the pain of others.

They seem to be more mindful of others.

Lahaina, it will be a new town rebuilt by those who have been hurt.

Lahaina, a town of history, aloha, tradition, culture, and diversity, will become a great town that incorporates new values of humility, kindness, and compassion.

One day the respected elders will say, "If you want to know the spirit of Aloha, go to Lahaina!"

It may become a town where you can say that.

A town full of compassion, it matches the local community that we at Lahaina Hongwanji Mission aim for.

We of Lahaina Hongwanji Mission will also do our best to rebuild this town of compassion.



Maui sunset vigil at Kā'anapali Golf Course

Finally, I would like to praise the name of Amida Buddha, who works in our struggling hearts to relieve the suffering.

Amida Buddha is the Buddha of voice which delivered Amida's healing power to peoples' painful hearts. The meaning of reciting Namo Amida Butsu is,

"Strong one as strong, the weak one as weak, the crying people as crying, and I am embracing you just as you are now. You don't have to be strong, because you are not that strong. You are not alone, you are already embraced by me."

Amida's voice became my voice, and it reaches my ears. It is the Buddha, the voice of wisdom and compassion.

Even if everything burns, the voice of Buddha never burned, but still shines and embraces us.

Namo Amida Butsu
Namo Amida Butsu

May Peace prevail in Lahaina.
May Peace prevail in the world.

May this event will raise the eye level of Lahaina people even just a little bit.

Namo Amida Butsu
Namo Amida Butsu

Lahaina Strong

Namo Amida Butsu
Namo Amida Butsu

Imua Imua Imua
Let's go Lahaina

Nan Man dabu
Nan Man dabu



Rev. Eric Matsumoto (third from left) with other religious representatives, Hawaii Governor and first lady Josh Green, and UHM dignitaries at vigil held at University of Hawaii at Manoa campus. (Hawaii News Now)