



Caring for the Community

A conversation with
Anthony Makana Paris (MA, '11)

By Laura Dunn

Recently, we caught up with GTU/JST alum, **Anthony Makana Paris (MA, '11)** in Honolulu to learn how he uses his GTU experiences and education to serve the Native Hawaiian community. Born and raised in Hawai'i, Makana calls himself a true conossieur of learning, having also studied engineering at MIT and law at the University of Hawai'i. Makana has served as a farmer and fisherman, as a teacher, minister, and lab specialist, as Vice Chair of 'Aha 2016, and currently as president of the Prince Kūhiō Hawaiian Civic Club. A former advisor to the Hawai'i Senate Judiciary and Labor Committee, Makana works across the islands as an entrepreneur, consultant, and research analyst for the Iron Workers Stabilization Fund.

What motivated you to attend the GTU?

I wanted to lay foundational written works for the study of Hawaiian Catholicism. I grew up in it, but there is no *palapala*—no written papers outside of old sermons and homilies. I wanted to articulate foundational principles and methods to the approach of Hawaiian Catholic theology.

I found that a lot of young Native Hawaiians were struggling with being Christian or religious of any sort because they felt that religion—especially Christianity—was in conflict with their cultural identity. I asked myself, “What has happened to the narratives we Hawaiians tell ourselves to be more human—more *kānaka*?” I would look at elders and they didn't have this problem. This problem was manifesting in younger people.

How did you address Native Hawaiian issues all the way in Berkeley?

I remember some colleagues in school would say to me, “You don't seem like a Catholic.” And I would say: “I am Hawaiian Catholic.” Someone asked, “If you are using all this Hawaiian language to express your spirituality, then what are you doing here?”

I chose to be Catholic, but the Divine made me Hawaiian. I understand my *kuleana*—the privileges I have—which call me to care for my home and for Native Hawaiians in particular. That

has been my true north—what I believe I am supposed to do. As Mother Teresa said, if you want to bring peace to the world, go back home and love your family. So with the best of preparation that I received from our ancient society and from that of today, I wanted to make sure I was prepared to do that.

Did your experience at the GTU influence your decision to go to law school?

When I taught in Hawai'i, I realized there was a problem with curricula support, financing, materials, and facilities, so I wanted to work through decision-making structures to help alleviate these problems. In my journey to gather intellectual tools, such as science and engineering at MIT and theology and philosophy at GTU, I asked myself, “What's the other major language that affects society today?” I saw in boardrooms that when a lawyer would say “no” to our proposed solutions to a problem, everyone would acquiesce, and I thought, “Wait a minute. How can we find a solution?”

I currently work in policy, law creation, and analysis. I set out knowing I was not going to work in litigation, because I could go into court and have one transaction, or I could learn how to adjust the system to increase societal well-being and flourishing, as well as to address social injustice. ♦

Laura Dunn is a third-year GTU doctoral student and a Native Hawaiian