



Eastern Highlands and Simbu Mission Headquarters, Goroka, Eastern Highlands Province, Papua New Guinea.
Photo courtesy of Janet Wambillie and Pauline Yorio.

Eastern Highlands Simbu Mission, Papua New Guinea, South Pacific Division

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Barry Oliver, Ph.D., retired in 2015 as president of the South Pacific Division of Seventh-day Adventists, Sydney, Australia. An Australian by birth Oliver has served the Church as a pastor, evangelist, college teacher, and administrator. In retirement, he is a conjoint associate professor at Avondale College of Higher Education. He has authored over 106 significant publications and 192 magazine articles. He is married to Julie with three adult sons and three grandchildren.

The Eastern Highlands Simbu Mission (EHSM) is the Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) administrative entity for the Eastern Highlands and Simbu provinces of Papua New Guinea. Its headquarters is in Goroka, Eastern Highlands Province, Papua New Guinea.¹

The Territory and Statistics of the Eastern Highlands Simbu Mission

The territory of the Eastern Highlands Simbu Mission is “Eastern Highlands Simbu, and Sub-Districts of Papua New

Guinea.”² It is a part of, and responsible to, the Papua New Guinea Union Mission (PNGUM) Lae, Morobe Province, Papua New Guinea. The Papua New Guinea Union Mission comprises the Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) Church entities in the country of Papua New Guinea. There are nine local missions and one local conference in the union. They are the Central Papuan Conference, the Bougainville Mission, the New Britain New Ireland Mission, the Northern and Milne Bay Mission, Morobe Mission, Madang Manus Mission, Sepik Mission, Eastern Highlands Simbu Mission, Western Highlands Mission, and South West Papuan Mission. The address of the administrative office of the Eastern Highlands Simbu Mission is Garden Street, Lot 7, Section 11, Goroka 441, Papua New Guinea. The postal address is P.O. Box 964, Goroka 441, Papua New Guinea.³

The mission operates under General Conference and South Pacific Division (SPD) operating policies. Those policies state that the officers of the Eastern Highlands Simbu Mission are elected by the PNGUM.⁴ “The mission president elected by the union is a member of the union committee and is the union representative in the conduct of the work in the mission. The president shall, with the local mission committee, supervise and carry forward the work in the local mission.”⁵ Mission associate officers and departmental personnel are elected at a duly called session of the mission at which representatives from all churches in the mission are present.⁶

In the *2018 Annual Statistical Report of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists*, the Eastern Highlands Simbu Mission was listed as having 249 organized churches and 695 companies. Church membership at the end of 2018 was 82,558. The mission had 162 active employees. Its tithe receipts for 2016 totaled US\$1,635,404. Its tithe and offerings per capita were US\$35.76.⁷

The Schools of the Eastern Highlands Simbu Mission

The report of the SPD education director at the end of 2018 showed that there were ten primary schools and two secondary schools in the territory of the mission, with a total of 5,027 students and 107 staff⁸

The schools are:

Bena Adventist Primary School. Located at Bena in the eastern Highlands Province, the school has an enrollment of 317 and a teaching staff of 12.

Homu Adventist Primary School. Located at Homu in the Eastern Highlands Province, the school has an enrollment of 226 and a teaching staff of 7.

Iwaki Adventist Primary School. Located at Okapa in the Eastern Highlands Province, the school has an enrollment of 239 and a teaching staff of 7.

Kabiufa Secondary. Located in Asaro—Watabung in the Eastern Highlands Province, the school has an enrollment of 1360 and a teaching staff of 20.

Kama Adventist Primary School. Located in Goroka in the Eastern Highlands Province, the school has an enrollment of 791 and a teaching staff of 10.

Kami Adventist Primary School. Located at Lufa in the Eastern Highlands Province, the school has an enrollment of 394 and a teaching staff of 10.

Kuso Adventist Primary School. Located in Asaro—Watabung in the Eastern Highlands Province, the school has an enrollment of 450 and a teaching staff of 7.

Megabo Adventist Primary School. Located at Bena in the Eastern Highlands Province, the school has an enrollment of 149 and a teaching staff of 7.

Moruma Adventist High School. Located at Kuman in the Simbu Province, the school has an enrollment of 377 and a teaching staff of 12.

Moruma Adventist Primary School. Located at Kuman in the Simbu Province, the school has an enrollment of 138 and a teaching staff of 6.

Omaura Adventist Primary School. Located at Omaura in the Eastern Highlands Province, the school has an enrollment of 339 and a teaching staff of 8.

Tobaiya Adventist Primary School. Located at Karamui in the Simbu Province, the school has an enrollment of 247 and a teaching staff of 8.

Clinics and Health Centers

EHSM Clinic. Located at Kabiufa, Eastern Highlands Province, the postal address is c/o P.O. Box 964, Goroka 411, Papua New Guinea.

Homu Aidpost. Located at Homu, Eastern Highlands Province, the postal address is c/o P.O. Box 964, Goroka 441, Papua New Guinea.

Kapi Health Centre. Located at Karamui in the Simbu Province, the postal address is c/o P.O. Box 964, Goroka 441, Papua New Guinea.

Les Anderson Memorial (Kora) Health Centre. Located at Lufa in the Eastern Highlands Province, the postal address is c/o P.O. Box 964, Goroka 411, Papua New Guinea.

Mengino Aidpost. Located at Karamui in the Simbu Province, the postal address is c/o P.O. Box 964, Goroka 441, Papua New Guinea.

The Arrival and Early History of SDA Church in Eastern Highlands

In 1934 Oti was chosen to help pioneer inland Papua New Guinea.⁹ A team of ten men from the Solomon Islands, Mussau Island, and Matupi were airlifted to build a mission station near Kainantu. Oti took his guitar to provide some music when they gathered some of the local people for worship. They spent seven months using native materials to build a mission school and homes for staff and students, then trekked for a week to reach Madang and board ship to return to Rabaul.¹⁰

In September 1935 it was announced that Alexander Campbell, who had recently been ordained, would be in charge of opening up the area of what is now known as the Eastern Highlands. In the notice of his appointment the area was termed "Morobe, or Central New Guinea."¹¹ In the same edition of the *Australasian Record* that made this announcement, another announcement had it that "Pastor A. J. Campbell, director of the Choiseul Mission, Solomon Islands, is being transferred to the Ramu Mission, Central New Guinea."¹² This latter designation was the more accurate of the two.

Campbell arrived in what he termed "Upper Ramu" early in 1936. The school, homes, and gardens that had been established by the advance party some months previously were in good condition, much to Campbell's relief!¹³ He soon recognized the missionary potential of the area. In May 1936 an urgent plea for 50 "teachers" was published in the *Australasian Record*.¹⁴ The Australasian Union Conference responded positively, and as a result, by October 1936 there were already mission stations at Omaura, Akuna, and Azura.¹⁵ In 1937 Stanley and Greta Gander were stationed at Bena. Speaking of Bena, Gander wrote:

"After many months of waiting for the necessary permit to enter this country, it is at last given, and we are now here on the spot. The journey takes two days solid going from the Ramu. The boys were heavily laden, and all were very tired when we arrived. Our party comprised ten teachers, 16 little boys, and myself. . . . We are having a wonderful time with the natives, and making a splendid contact.

"The chiefs of the area are most eager that we stay with them, and are most willing to sell us their land. All are very much decorated, and they are here by the thousands. The proposition here is far beyond my expectations, and the site chosen, I believe, has been waiting for us. We are one hour's walk from the 'drome, and in the midst of thousands of natives.

"The soil will grow anything and is easily worked. Having done a great deal of travel in Australia, I have been able to see much grand scenery, but this beats all. The gardens are beautiful, and all in perfect order, and they are something worth seeing. . . .

"We are camped under canvas flys, and I have put bamboo floors in each, and shut the sides in with long grass, so you can see we are cozy. I return in a few days to Ramu, and a whole crowd of natives are coming with me to carry back some of the tools and other things. The more I see of this country and its thousands, the more I am impressed with the magnitude of our task, and the need to secure good young workers in Australia for this hinterland of New Guinea. May God give us wisdom for our future responsibility."¹⁶

The Arrival and Early History of SDA Church in Simbu

Seventh-day Adventist missionaries first set foot in the Simbu when Alexander Campbell, David Brennan, and Stanley Gander were hiking overland to reach Mount Hagen, where they were evacuated to Australia to escape the advancing Japanese forces in World War II.¹⁷

As the war was coming toward its conclusion, Gominis, a teacher on Lou Island Manus, wrote to Alexander Campbell that "soon some of our SDA teachers will be going out to Chimbu to erect some buildings. We must pray hard to God that this war will quickly finish so that this gospel can go to all men, so that all can hear about the coming of Jesus, and many be ready to meet Him."¹⁸

Reporting on plans to commence working in the Central Highlands as the area was then known, the *Australasian Record* of December 8, 1947, stated: "Early in 1946 plans were discussed for the extension of the work into the areas of Chimbu, Wahgi, Hagen, and Wabag. Representations were made, provisional plans for a quick advance were in readiness; only one thing was necessary. The government had restrictions upon the movement of Europeans in these areas, unless stations had been established in those areas prewar. In our case, unfortunately, no stations had been established.

"On July 1 the country was thrown open, and freedom of movement was possible."¹⁹

In February and March 1948 Robert Frame and Ward Nolan together with a number of porters walked from Bena Bena to Hagen and then on to Wabag, a distance of 240 miles (386 kilometers). They were investigating sites for new mission stations through the Simbu.²⁰ A short time later David Brennan and his wife were the first to open a mission station in the Simbu.²¹ They were stationed at Kerowagi.²² They were followed shortly thereafter by Laurence Gilmore and his wife.²³ They were stationed at Omkalikaukau.²⁴

By the end of 1948 David Brennan had established a mission station at Moruma.²⁵ In 1953 the Eastern Highlands Mission was organized. Since the Eastern Highlands Mission was organized in 1953 and later renamed in 1985, the church has grown as follows:

1953	7 churches		768 members ²⁶
1960	26 churches		2716 members ²⁷
1970	47 churches		6877 members ²⁸
1980	81 churches		14795 members ²⁹
1990	115 churches		44119 members ³⁰
2000	175 churches	500 companies	64648 members ³¹
2010	206 churches	629 companies	78998 members ³²
2018	249 churches	695 companies	82558 members ³³

The History of the Development of the Eastern Highlands Simbu Mission Structure

Up until 1929, there was no formal organizational structure in the mission territories of the Australasian Union Conference which included the territories of the Eastern Highlands and Simbu. In 1929, with the arrival of Griffiths Jones at Matupi on the island of New Britain, an entity simply known as the “Mandated Territory of New Guinea” appeared in the *SDA Yearbook*. The superintendent was G. F. Jones. And the address was “SDA Mission, Matupit, Rabaul.”³⁴ This entity, as its name implied, included within its territory the whole of the mandated territory of New Guinea, including Eastern Highlands and Simbu. In 1932 the name of the entity was changed to simply “Territory of New Guinea.”³⁵

In 1945 a “Papua–New Guinea Mission” was formed.³⁶ This mission included all the territory of the former “territory of New Guinea Mission, and the former Papua Mission [the Papua Mission had been organized in 1928].”³⁷ The Papua–New Guinea Mission headquarters were located in Port Moresby, Papua. The first superintendent was R.A.R. Thrift.³⁸ In 1946 the name of the Papua–New Guinea Mission was changed to Papua North East New Guinea Mission.³⁹ Eastern Highlands and Simbu were in the territory of this mission.

In 1953, with the reorganization of the Coral Sea Union Mission, the Eastern Highlands Mission was formed. It was established with headquarters in Goroka.⁴⁰ The Coral Sea Union Mission now had the following missions:

- Central Papuan Mission, under L. I. Howell
- Eastern Highlands Mission, under A. J. Campbell
- Eastern Papua Mission, under Ngava
- Madang Mission, under T. F. Judd
- Morobe Mission, under J. H. Newman
- Sepik Mission, under S. H. Gander
- Western Highlands, under F. J. Maberley
- Western Papua, under H. M. Pascoe

In 1985 the Eastern Highlands Mission changed its name to Eastern Highlands Simbu Mission.⁴¹ Since it was first organized as the Eastern Highlands Mission in 1953, the headquarters of the mission have remained at Garden Street, Lot 7, Section 11, Goroka, Papua New Guinea.

Affiliation With the Australasian Union Conference

Until 1949 all of the local conference and mission entities throughout the Australasian Union Conference related directly to that union, with headquarters in Sydney. But at a specially called session of the Australasian Union between August 16 and 21, 1948, a proposal for a major reorganization was presented, discussed, and approved. Australia and New Zealand were divided between two union conferences known as the “Trans-Tasman Union Conference” and the “Trans-Commonwealth Union Conference.” The mission territories were divided into two union missions known as the “Coral Sea Union Mission” and the “Central Pacific Union Mission.” The headquarters of the Coral Sea Union were in Lae, Mandated Territory of New Guinea.

Eastern Highlands Simbu Territory Within the Coral Sea Union Mission

In that reorganization in 1949, the Papua North East New Guinea Mission, which included the territory of the Western Highlands, became one of the local missions of the Coral Sea Union Mission. The territory of the Coral Sea Union Mission was “Papua, the Mandated Territory of New Guinea, and the British Solomon Islands Protectorate.”⁴²

Eastern Highlands Mission as a Local Mission Within the Reorganized Coral Sea Union Mission

In 1953 the territory of the Coral Sea Union Mission was divided into a Coral Sea Union Mission and a Bismarck–Solomons Union Mission.⁴³ The Coral Sea Union Mission continued to have its headquarters in Lae, New Guinea. The reorganized union now had as its territory “Papua and the mainland of the Mandated Territory of New Guinea; comprising the Central Papuan, Eastern Highlands, Eastern Papuan, Madang, Morobe, Sepik, Papuan Gulf, Western Highlands, and Western Papuan Missions.”⁴⁴

Affiliation With the Papua New Guinea Union Mission

In 1972 there was another reorganization of the union missions in the Australasian Division. A Papua New Guinea Union Mission (PNGUM) was formed, with ten local missions.⁴⁵ They were as follows:

Bougainville Mission; established in 1929 and organized in 1953
Central Papuan Mission; established in 1908
Eastern Highlands Mission; organized in 1953
Madang Manus Mission; organized in 1949; reorganized in 1953, 1972
Morobe Mission; organized in 1953
New Britain New Ireland Mission; organized in 1953; reorganized in 1961, 1972
North East Papuan Mission; organized in 1953, reorganized in 1972
Papuan Gulf Mission; organized in 1954, reorganized in 1960
Sepik Mission; organized in 1953
Western Highlands Mission; organized in 1953⁴⁶

In 2000 another major reorganization of the unions in the South Pacific Division occurred at the South Pacific Division session.⁴⁷ Five unions were reduced to four by rearranging boundaries. This change did not alter the territory of the Papua New Guinea Union Mission.

Presidents of the Eastern Highlands Simbu Mission Since Its Organization in 1953

Alexander J. Campbell (1953–1956); Albert D. Pietz (1957–1962); Hugh A. Dickins (1963–1969); Elwyn A. Raethel (1970–1972); John R. Richardson (1973); Lester N. Hawkes (1974–1977); Adrian R. Craig (1978–1980); John H. Gate (1981–1984); Albert A. Godfrey (1985–1986); Graeme J. Humble (1987–1990); Jesseley Farugoso (1990–1998); Peter Oli (1999–2000); Jeffrey Paul (2001–2003); Jesseley Farugoso (2004–2010); Benny Soga (2010–2017); Joanis Fezamo (2017–).

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NOTES

1. Much of the information in this article comes from the personal knowledge and experience of the author as a former general secretary and president of the South Pacific Division of Seventh-day Adventists. The author acknowledges the contribution of Pauline Yorio, administrative secretary in the Papua New Guinea Union Mission office, in the collation of the information for this article.?
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