



Headquarters office of the Central Papuan Conference, Ela Beach, Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea, June 2008.

Photo courtesy of Barry Oliver.

Central Papua Conference, South Pacific Division

BARRY OLIVER

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 Central Papua Conference (CPC) is the Seventh-day Adventist Church administrative entity for the Central Province and National Capital District of Papua New Guinea.¹

The territory of CPC is “Central Province and National Capital District of Papua New Guinea.”² It is a constituent conference of the Papua New Guinea Union, located in Lae, Morobe Province, Papua New Guinea. The Papua New Guinea Union Mission comprises the Seventh-day Adventist 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 Papua 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 Papua Mission. The administrative office of CPC is located at Ela Beach, Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea.

In the annual statistical report for 2019, CPC was listed as having 127 organized churches and 273 companies. Church membership at the end of 2018 was 62,064. The mission had 349 active employees. Its tithe receipts for 2017 totaled US\$4,857,535. Its tithe and offerings per capita were US\$183.16.³

The Institutions of the Central Papua Conference

Schools

The report of the SPD Education Director at the end of 2018 showed that there were fourteen primary schools and two secondary schools in the Central Papua Conference with a total of 5860 students and 161 staff⁴

At the end of 2018, the schools of the Central Papua Conference and their enrollments were:

Alawe Primary School, located at Bisiatabu, Central Province, with an enrollment of thirty-three students and two teaching staff.

Barai Primary School, located at Kwikila, Central Province, with an enrollment of ninety-two students and two teaching staff.

Baramatta Central School, located at Cape Rodney, Central Province, with an enrollment of 136 students and three teaching staff.

Bila Aia Central School, located at Abau, Central Province, with an enrollment of 186 students and six teaching staff.

Bisiatabu Central School, located at Bisiatabu, Central Province, with an enrollment of 229 students and six teaching staff.

Carr Memorial School, located in Port Moresby, National Capital District, with an enrollment of 1742 students and thirty teaching staff.

Domara Central School, located at Cape Rodney, Central Province, with an enrolment of 213 students and seven teaching staff.

Edevu Central School, located on the outskirts of Port Moresby, National Capital District, with an enrollment of 152 students and seven teaching staff.

Efogi Primary School, located at Efogi, Central Province, with an enrollment of 123 students and seven teaching staff.

Gavuone Central School, located at Korela, Central Province, with has an enrollment of 307 students and seven teaching staff.

Gohodae Central School, located at Abau, Central Province, with has an enrollment of 310 students and eleven teaching staff.

Koiari Park Primary School, located on the campus of Pacific Adventist University, with an enrollment of 390 students and seven teaching staff.

Koiari Park Secondary School, located on the edge of the campus of Pacific Adventist University, with an enrollment of 1073 students and twenty-six teaching staff.

Manari Central School, located at Manari, Central Province, with an enrolment of 120 students and two teaching staff.

Mt. Diamond Secondary School, located twenty kilometers from the center of Port Moresby, with an enrollment of 754 students and twenty-seven teaching staff.

Toule Central School, located at Rigo, Central Province, with an enrollment of 362 students with twelve teaching staff.

Clinics and Dispensaries:

The Central Papua Conference also operated six medical clinics and dispensaries as of 2018.

Avitana Aidpost. The postal address is c/o P.O. Box 332; Port Moresby 121; Papua New Guinea.

Londairi Aidpost. Located at Kwilila, Central Province the postal address is c/o P.O. Box 332; Port Moresby 121; Papua New Guinea.

Manari Aidpost. Located at Manari, Central Province, the postal address is c/o P.O. Box 332; Port Moresby 121; Papua New Guinea.

Pelagai Aidpost. Located at Aroma, Central Province, the postal address is c/o P.O. Box 332; Port Moresby 121; Papua New Guinea.

Tororo Health Centre. Located at Goilala, Central Province, the postal address is c/o P.O. Box 332; Port Moresby 121; Papua New Guinea.

Toule Aidpost. Located at Rigo, Central Province, the postal address is c/o P.O. Box 332; Port Moresby 121; Papua New Guinea.

Arrival and Early History of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Papua (1908)

Septimus and Edith Carr, expatriate teachers at the Buresala Training School in Fiji, were nominated in 1907 to lead the establishment of the Church in Papua.⁵ They chose one of their students, Benisimani Tavodi (known as Bennie or Benny), to assist them. They arrived in Port Moresby in June 1908 and found temporary accommodation there.⁶ Carr travelled to the Sogeri Plateau northeast of Port Moresby where he found a tract of land at Bisiatabu.⁷ He applied to the government, requesting the long term lease of 150 acres from the Koiari people.⁸ Late in 1909, these arrangements were completed. At the same time help arrived in the persons of Gordon and Maud Smith, both nursing graduates, accompanied by Solomon from the Cook Islands.⁹ Tavodi and Solomon did much of the hard labor, clearing and preparing the ground and planting taro, bananas, citrus, and rubber trees.¹⁰ A mission home composed of local materials was erected. Both the house and the land were dedicated on February 28, 1910.¹¹

In 1914, the government granted the Australasian Conference Association permission to operate a mission in its own right.¹² Soon thereafter the Carrs were transferred to pastoral work in Queensland in 1915.¹³ They had been in Papua for almost seven years. Tavodi and Aliti Tavodi pressed on. Late in 1913, Tavodi trekked deep into the mountainous terrain along what later came to be known as the Kokoda Track. He reached Efogi, Kagi, Seragina, Hagari, Bapari, and Kotoi.¹⁴ He pushed on and visited Naori and Ilibane, but was not able to make himself understood, so retraced his steps, having reached the slopes of Mount Victoria.¹⁵

On Wednesday, October 9, 1918, Tavodi was bitten by a Papuan black snake and lost his life.¹⁶ By this time Arthur and Enid Lawson were leading out at Bisiatabu. He had arrived on September 30, 1911, and she arrived about one year later at which time they were married.¹⁷ They continued to work at Bisiatabu until their return to Australia in early 1921.¹⁸

Pastor and Mrs. William N. Lock arrived in Port Moresby, Papua, on July 16, 1924. They remained at Bisiatabu for some time making preparations for setting up a mission station at Efogi, high in the mountains.¹⁹ The journey to Efogi along the Kokoda Trail took six difficult days. With the family settled, work began, including a school for the local villagers. For two and a half years, the Lock family lived and worked at Efogi, all the time making many trips to Bisiatabu then back up the trail to Efogi. No baptisms came from those years of work. However, shortly after leaving Efogi, William Lock returned to baptize a man by the name of Faole. When they moved back to Bisiatabu, the Locks were replaced by Charles and Evelyn Mitchell.

With the work at Efogi and Bisiatabu progressing well, Lock decided it was time to move along the coast of Papua. However, it proved difficult to obtain freehold land on which to establish a mission station. A conversation with the manager of Burns Philp and company Limited (known as Burns Philp) in Port Moresby encouraged Lock to start work along the coast east of Port Moresby. Burns Philp had freehold land in the Marshall Lagoon at Korela that the company was willing to sell and another parcel at Pelagi on the Aroma Coast. In 1929, Lock inspected the land. He advised the mission headquarters of its availability and suitability. Word came back to proceed with negotiations to buy. Subsequently, a mission station was established at Korela. Charles and Evelyn Mitchel were transferred from Efogi, and later Faole, who had been working as a minister, was appointed to evangelize in the area.

Charles and Evelyn Mitchell arrived in Vilirupu, Korela, in November 1928. They set about establishing a new mission station, although it was obvious that they were severely disadvantaged without a vessel. They only had a few months to wait before the new mission launch, the *Matamana*, was delivered.²⁰

As progress was made, William Lock realized it was becoming necessary to have a centralized training school. Freehold land was located near the village of Tubuseria. Guiroha, later Mirigeda, became the site for this new school with buildings recycled from a nearby abandoned mine site. Lock and his family moved to Mirigeda to establish what became known as the Mirigeda Training School. Mirigeda soon became the mission headquarters. In 1937, Ken and Dorothy Gray joined the staff of the school.²¹ After seventeen years working in Papua, the Lock family returned to Australia in 1941.

After World War II, the work of the Church continued to expand in Papua. With the organization of the Central Papua Mission in 1953, which embraced all the territory of the present Central Papua Conference, the number of churches and church membership grew from 1,133 members in fourteen churches to 28,059 members in ninety-one churches and fifty-five companies by 2000. After the organization in 2008 of a Central Papua Conference in 2008, membership expanded to 62,064 members in 127 churches and 273 companies as of 2019.

| | | | |
|------|--------------|---------------|-----------------------------|
| 1953 | 14 Churches | | 1133 members ²² |
| 1960 | 25 Churches | | 3621 members ²³ |
| 1970 | 49 Churches | | 5576 members ²⁴ |
| 1980 | 60 Churches | | 9939 members ²⁵ |
| 1990 | 74 Churches | | 14268 members ²⁶ |
| 2000 | 91 Churches | 55 Companies | 28059 members ²⁷ |
| 2008 | 103 Churches | 125 Companies | 28059 members ²⁸ |
| 2019 | 127 Churches | 273 Companies | 62064 members ²⁹ |

Organizational History of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Central Papua: Conference Structure

Following the establishment of the Adventist Church in Papua through the work of S. W. Carr and Peni Tavodi begun in 1908,³⁰ the territory of New Guinea was included as one small entity in a group of countries known as the Melanesian Mission in 1917.³¹ In 1918, plans were made to form the North Queensland-Papua Mission. It was recommended:

WHEREAS, The territory of the Queensland Conference as now fixed presents almost insurmountable difficulties for aggressive work being undertaken in the northern portion by the Queensland Conference; and WHEREAS, This northern section offers favorable opportunity for developing strong work, We Recommend, That the portion of Queensland to the north of the terminus of Brisbane-Rockhampton railway, together with Papua, be formed into a mission field under the supervision of the Union Conference, to be known as the North Queensland-Papua Mission.³²

Pastor A. H. White was chosen as the superintendent of the North Queensland-Papua Mission and the headquarters were established in Charters Towers, Australia.³³ The mission was renamed the New Guinea Mission in 1921.³⁴ At the Australasian Union Conference session held in September 1922, the union secretary, W. G. Turner reported that:

Owing to the difficulty in operating Papua from Queensland, the organization known as the North Queensland-Papua Mission has been dissolved, the two fields now working as separate missions under the direction of the Australasian Union Conference.³⁵

A Papua Mission was organized in 1928 with headquarters at Bisiatabu. W. N. Lock was the first superintendent.³⁶ In 1932, the headquarters was moved to Bootless Bay, Port Moresby, Papua.³⁷ Three years later it relocated once again, this time to Mirigeda, Port Moresby, Papua.³⁸ In 1945, the territory was reorganized as part of the Papua-New Guinea Mission, which included all the territory of the former Papua Mission and the former territory of New Guinea Mission.³⁹ Headquarters were located in Port Moresby. The superintendent was R. A. R. Thrift.⁴⁰ The name of the Papua-New Guinea Mission was changed to Papua North East New Guinea Mission in 1946.⁴¹

The Coral Sea Union Mission was organized with four local missions in 1949.⁴² In addition to the Papua-New Guinea Mission, the new union included Bismarck Archipelago Mission—formerly included in the Papua-New Guinea Mission, but organized as a separate mission in 1947; the Northeast New Guinea Mission, organized in 1949; the Papuan Mission, reorganized in 1949; and the Solomon Islands Mission.

In 1953, the region underwent another reorganization with the formation of the Bismark Solomons Union Mission. In this organization, the local missions were the Bougainville Mission, with headquarters in Inus and

Cyril Pascoe, president; the Manus Mission, with Karese Manovaki, president; the New Britain Mission, with headquarters in Rabaul and Eric A. Boehm, president; and the New Ireland Mission, with headquarters in Kavieng and John Rongapitu, president.⁴³ The reorganized Coral Sea Union Mission was comprised of the Central Papua Mission (reorganized in 1949 and renamed in 1954) with headquarters at Ela Beach, Port Moresby and Laurence I. Howell, president; the Eastern Highlands Mission, with headquarters in Goroka and A. J. Campbell, president; The Eastern Papua Mission, with headquarters at Tufi and Ngava, president; the Madang Mission (organized in 1949, reorganized in 1953) with headquarters at Madang and T. F. Judd, president; the Morobe Mission, with headquarters at Wau and John H. Newman, president; the Sepik Mission, with headquarters at Wewak and S. H. Gander, president; the Western Highlands Mission, with headquarters at Mt. Hagen and F. J. Maberly, president; and the Western Papua Mission, with headquarters at Port Romilly and H. Martin Pascoe, president.⁴⁴

The territory was once again reorganized in 1972 when the Papua New Guinea Union Mission was organized with ten local missions:⁴⁵ the Bougainville Mission, organized 1953; the Central Papua Mission, organized 1908; the Eastern Highlands Mission, organized 1953; the Madang Manus Mission, organized 1949, reorganized 1953, 1972; the Morobe Mission, organized 1953; the New Britain New Ireland Mission, organized 1953, reorganized 1961, 1972; the North East Papuan Mission, organized 1953, reorganized 1972; the Papuan Gulf Mission, organized 1954, reorganized 1960; the Sepik Mission, organized 1953; and the Western Highlands Mission, organized 1953.⁴⁶

After the formation of the Papua New Guinea Union Mission and the reorganization of the missions in Papua New Guinea, the Madang Mission, Manus Mission, New Ireland Mission, East New Britain Mission, West New Britain Mission, Milne Bay Mission, and North Papuan Mission ceased to exist.

Between August 6 and 9, 2008, the Central Papua Mission was organized as the Central Papua Conference at its inaugural constituency meeting. Tony Kemo, who had been the ministerial association secretary for the Papua New Guinea Union Mission, was appointed the first president of the conference. Andrew Lukale, who had been the stewardship director for the Central Papua Mission, was appointed general secretary, and Max Lassah, chief financial officer for the mission continued in this role for the new conference.⁴⁷

Just two days before the constituency meeting, Gilbert Egu, general secretary of the Central Papua Mission died suddenly of kidney failure in Port Moresby General Hospital. As mission general secretary, Egu had liaised closely with the Papua New Guinea Union Mission and the South Pacific Division to prepare for the constituency meeting and the granting of conference status.⁴⁸

History of Central Papua's Union Conference Affiliation

Affiliation with the Australasian Union Conference

Until 1949, all of the local conference and mission entities throughout the territory of the Australasian Union Conference, related directly to the union with headquarters in Sydney. But at a specially called session of the Australasian Union between August 16 and 21, 1948, a major reorganization was 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 also divided into two union missions known as the Coral Sea Union Mission and the Central Pacific Union Mission.

Central Papua within the Coral Sea Union Mission

In the 1949 reorganization, the Papuan Mission 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."⁴⁹

Central Papuan Mission as a Local Mission within the Coral Sea Union Mission

In 1953, the territory of the Coral Sea Union Mission was divided into the Coral Sea Union Mission and the Bismarck-Solomons Union Mission.⁵⁰ The Central Papuan Mission was part of the Coral Sea Union Mission.⁵¹

Affiliation with the Papua New Guinea Union Mission

In 1972, a major reorganization of the union missions in the Australasian Division made the Central Papuan Mission one of ten local missions in the new Papua New Guinea Union Mission.⁵² The local missions were the Bougainville Mission (established in 1929 and organized in 1953), the Central Papuan Mission (established in 1908), the Eastern Highlands Mission (organized in 195), the Madang Manus Mission (organized in 1949, reorganized in 1953, 1972), the Morobe Mission (organized in 1953), the New Britain New Ireland Mission (organized in 1953, reorganized in 1961, 1972), the North East Papuan Mission (organized in 1953, reorganized in 1972), the Papuan Gulf Mission (organized in 1954, reorganized in 1960), the Sepik Mission (organized in 1953), and the Western Highlands Mission (organized in 1953).⁵³

The missions that had existed up until the reorganization in 1972, but which were absorbed into other missions on reorganization, were: the Madang Mission, the Manus Mission, the New Ireland Mission, the East New Britain Mission, the West New Britain Mission, the Milne Bay Mission, and the North Papuan Mission.⁵⁴

In 2000, another major reorganization of the unions in the South Pacific Division occurred at the South Pacific Division session.⁵⁵ Five unions were reduced to four by rearranging boundaries. However, this change did not alter the territory of the Papua New Guinea Union Mission.

Superintendents and Presidents of the Missions and Conference in the Territory of Central Papua 1908-2020

New Guinea Mission (1908-1916): Septimus Carr (1908-1915); Arthur Lawson (1915-1918).

North Queensland Papua Mission (1918-1921): A. H. White (1918-1920).

New Guinea Mission (1921-1928): Arthur Lawson (1921); G. F. Jones (1922-1923); William N. Lock (1924-1928).

Papua Mission (1928-1945): William N. Lock (1928-1940); George H. Engelbrecht (1941-1942); C. E. Mitchell (1943-1944).

Papua-New Guinea Mission (1945): Roy A. R. Thrift (1945).

Papua North East New Guinea Mission (1946-1948): Robert R. Frame (1946-1948).

Papuan Mission (1949-1953): C. E. Mitchell (1949-1953).

Central Papuan Mission (1953-2008): Laurence I. Howell (1953-1958); Ormond L. Speck (1959-1960); Ernest C. Lemke (1961-1966); Lester N. Lock (1967-1970); John R. Richardson (1971-1972); Lui Oli (1973-1976); Yori Hibo (1977-1985); Wilson Stephen (1985-1987); Piuki Tasa (1988-1990); Daniel Haru (1990-1995); Tony Kemo (1995-2000); Yori Hibo (2000-2001); Peter Oli (2001-2008).

Central Papua Conference (2008-): Tony Kemo (2008-2013); Kove Tau (2014-)

SOURCES

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NOTES

1. Unless otherwise credited, the information in this article comes from the personal knowledge and experience of the author as a former general secretary of the South Pacific Division (1997 -2007) and president of the South Pacific Division (2007 – 2015). The author acknowledges the assistance of Pauline Yorio, administrative secretary of the Papua New Guinea Union Mission in the collection of information for this article.
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4. All data is derived from the "2018 Annual Statistical Report of the South Pacific Division Education Department to the General Conference," unpublished report held in the files of the Education Director, South Pacific Division of the General Conference, Wairoa, New South Wales, Australia.
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21. Goldie Down, *When Father Disappeared*, (Hornsby, New South Wales: Eben Publishers, 1994), 42.
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