

Tanabose Viviriti Lukukana (d. 1981) and Leah Barighaza (Bitalo) (d. 1984)

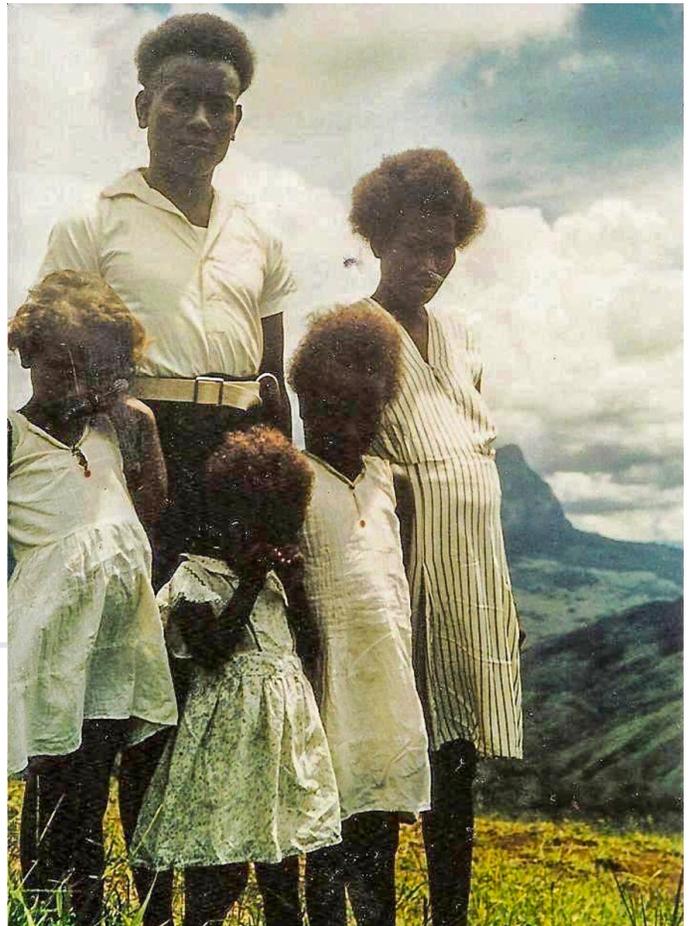
LAWRENCE PITA TANABOSE

Lawrence Pita Tanabose, M.A. (Avondale University College, Cooranbong, New South Wales, Australia), retired in 2013 as the secretary of the South Pacific Division of Seventh-day Adventists, Sydney, Australia. A Solomon Islander, born of missionary parents in Papua New Guinea, Pastor Tanabose has served the Church as a pastor, evangelist, departmental director and administrator. In retirement, he served as the president of the Solomon Islands Mission until taking up residence on his home island of Choiseul. Tanabose is married to Rosina with three adult children.

Pacific Islanders Tanabose Viviriti Lukukana and Leah Barighaza served the Church at various capacities. Tanabose was a teacher, pastor, church planter, and administrator.

Early Life and Education

Tanabose Viviriti Lukukana was born at Masilata in Kolokao, Choiseul Island, Solomon Islands, in 1921 into a pagan family who knew nothing of the God of the Bible.¹ The day and month of his birth are unknown because his people were illiterate and kept no permanent records. His father, Lukukana Sembolo, was the chief and a warrior of his tribe. His mother, Puivavini, was from another tribe. From childhood until he was twenty years old, he grew up within the protection of the forest because of fear of other tribal enemies. The Seventh-day Adventist Church arrived in the Choiseul Islands in 1923. When he was twenty years old, Tanabose was sent to a newly established Adventist educational center called Ruruvai Central School on South Choiseul. He was very happy with his new Christian faith. A couple of months later he learned that his family had also accepted the Seventh-day Adventist beliefs and culture. He was given an opportunity to work with Mr. Rom, a crocodile



Pastor Tanabose, his wife Leah, & three daughters, Ruth, Nancy & Jeanette at Yani, Papua New Guinea, c. 1952.

Photo courtesy of Gilmore Tanabose.

hunter, to earn his educational tuition fees. His job was to assist Mr. Rom to hunt crocodiles and to prepare crocodile skins for export.

At Ruruvai Central School, he completed grades 1 to 3, but then World War II disrupted his education. From 1940 to 1945, while a student at Ruruvai Central School, he worked as a coast guardsman for the British government. He was also preparing to become a missionary teacher. He was married to Leah Barighaza (Bitalo) at Ruvuvai Central School in 1944. Tanabose and Leah had their first baby girl, Ruth Gubulonga Tanabose, in 1945.

Tanabose and Leah had nine children: Ruth Gubulonga, a college lecturer (now retired); Nancy Puivavini, a nurse (now retired); Jeannette Keritina, a church leader (now retired); Lawrence Pita, a church administrator; Geoffrey Tanito, a church teacher, Betsy Nanazoana, a business manager; Kenneth Lukukana, a church accountant; Annette Rogeleke, a director of tourism; and Junelyn Gilatoke, a personal secretary of a company. All of his children are currently active in witnessing for the Lord and in supporting the mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

His Life in God's Service

After his training at Ruruvai Central School he and family were sent by the Solomon Islands Seventh-day Adventist executive committee to teach at Billy Passage, Marovo Lagoon, Western Solomon Islands, in 1946. This appointment was the beginning of his Christian missionary journey until his retirement in January 1981.

For 12 years he taught in various schools within the Solomon Islands and then in Papua New Guinea. He was instrumental in planting new churches, especially in the highlands of Papua New Guinea. As an experienced local church clerk, a local church treasurer, a personal ministry leader, a musician, and a singer, he was able to strengthen and grow local churches in the interior of Papua New Guinea. On transfer from the Solomon Islands to the highlands of Papua New Guinea, he was assigned as district director and church pastor, being supervised and mentored by the Australian and European missionaries to Papua New Guinea. He was ordained into gospel ministry at Moruma Mission Station while serving as the district director for Chimbu province in 1958. Establishing and growing local churches were his greatest interest and delight in the gospel ministry.

His Years of Service

Dates	Service	Place
January 1946–December 1946	Teacher	Billy Passage, Western Solomon Islands
January 1947–December 1947	Teacher	Sobiro, Western Solomon Islands
January 1948–December 1948	Teacher	Gatokae, Western Solomon Islands

Dates	Service	Place
January 1949–December 1949	Teacher and Pastor	Batuna, Western Solomon Islands
January 1950–December 1950	Teacher and Pastor	Pejuku, Western Solomon Islands
January 1951–December 1952	Teacher and Pastor	Ubuni, Papua New Guinea
January 1953–December 1953	Teacher and church planter	Kundiawa, Papua New Guinea
January 1954–December 1954	Teacher and church planter	Yeani, Papua New Guinea
January 1955–December 1955	Teacher and church planter	Onimoguma, Papua New Guinea
January 1956–December 1957	District director and church planter	Kumul, Papua New Guinea
January 1958–December 1959	District director and church planter	Moruma, Papua New Guinea
January 1960–December 1961	District director and church planter	Kainantu, Papua New Guinea
January 1962–December 1965	District director and church planter	Buin, Bougainville, Papua New Guinea
January 1966–December 1969	District director and church planter	Itai, Bougainville, Papua New Guinea
January 1970–December 1973	District director and church planter	Loloko, Choiseul Island, Solomon Islands
January 1974–December 1977	District director and church planter	Ruruvai, Choiseul Island, Solomon Islands
January 1978–December 1981	District director and church planter	Rarata, New Georgia, Solomon Islands
January 1981	Retirement; continued to serve as pastor	

His Leadership Qualities

Tanabose Lukukana was successful in planting new churches in the Eastern and Western Highlands of New Guinea because he was friendly and courageous in helping the people who were then steeped in traditional magic, sorceries, and devil worship to know that there is a God in heaven who loves them and could protect them from evil spirits. There were times he would enter areas that had been declared as dangerous for Christian missionaries. While sharing the gospel stories, he would heal the sick with simple treatments and instruction about a healthful lifestyle. He would teach them about the Creator God and His Son, who came and died to rescue them from evil spirits and sin. Because he was willing to visit regularly unentered territories, many pagan communities invited him to establish a house for his Creator God.

Because of his willingness to take the gospel to heathen communities, he often experienced divine intervention in protecting him from the devil priests. Power encounters would often render them ineffective against him. There were times his food was poisoned. He would always pray over his food and eat while the perpetrators watched. When he did not die, they requested the power that he had. Often as a result, Bible studies would take place, baptisms would follow, and a new company of believers was established.

An example of what was encountered when opening new territories comes from an itinerary into the area of Watabung in Chimbu province, Papua New Guinea, in 1955. It was toward evening, and Tanabose decided to press on with some people from a nearby district who insisted that they should reach Pore village before dark. On their way they had to cross the Watabung River, but it was in flood stage. There was nowhere for them to cross. Tanabose decided to swim across with his bag, and as was his custom, he prayed and asked God for power and protection. At the conclusion of his prayer he turned and saw a person standing beside him. Without a word the person pointed to a rope bridge about six meters from where he was standing. He thanked the man, breathed a prayer of thanks, and made the crossing. It was risky. There was no way of escape if he fell into the rushing torrent. When he got to the other side, he turned to shout words of thanks to the person on the other side of the river, but both the rope bridge and the person were nowhere to be seen. Even the people who were on the other side of the river could not work out how he was already safe on the other side.

He decided then to continue on to Pore, where the people were still cannibals. When he arrived at the village and as soon as they saw him, they decided to kill him for meat, because he was very black, as are the people of Choiseul. They showed him a place to sleep and gave him a piece of human flesh to eat for dinner. He told them that he did not eat flesh. He called them to come close, pulled out his Bible Picture Roll, and started telling them about the love of Jesus, the commandment not to kill, the new earth, and the soon return of Jesus. There was a young boy, Mena, among those who was listening. He had been interpreting for Tanabose. Later in the night he woke Tanabose and told him to escape with him because the people were planning to kill him and eat him. Mena led Tanabose through the jungle, up the mountain trails, and through the valleys for some days until they were safely within a police protection area.

Later Life, Contribution, and Legacy

The Western Solomon Islands Mission granted Tanabose retirement in January 1981 while he and his wife were serving the Church as district director and church planter in the district of New Georgia, Western Solomon Islands Mission. At his retirement the Solomon Islands government granted him the Solomon Islands Independence Medal, an honor for his service, leadership, and commitment to the people of Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands. During his retirement he served the Church as pastor of his local church. Throughout his ministry his leadership style had made an impact on many young men who followed in his footsteps and became Seventh-day Adventist ministers, including his own son, Lawrence Pita Tanabose, who is now retired but has served the Church at various capacities in local churches, Solomon Islands Mission, Pacific Adventist University, Western Pacific Union, Trans Pacific Union, and the South Pacific Division. Lawrence Tanabose was the first from the Pacific Islands to be the secretary of the South Pacific Division of Seventh-day Adventists.

Tanabose Lukukana died of a heart attack on December 21, 1981, at the age of 61 while traveling to Gimagama to establish a church. Leah Barighaza Tanabose died at Posarae village on the island of Choiseul on January 16,

1984.

Note

1. Since no extant written sources exist, this biography is written from oral sources as follows: Lawrence Pita Tanabose, personal knowledge as a son of Tanabose Viviriti Lukukana and Leah Barighaza (Bitalo) and being an eyewitness to their lives and knowledgeable about their ministry until their deaths. Also Ruth Gubulonga, interview by author, Honiara, Solomon Islands, January 19, 2017; Nancy Puivavini Djokovic, interview by author, Honiara, Solomon Islands, January 19, 2017; Jeanette Keritina Navo, interview by author, Honiara, Solomon Islands, January 19, 2017; Betsy Nanazoana Kuma, interview by author, Honiara, Solomon Islands, January 19, 2017.

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