



Northern and Milne Bay Mission headquarters, Papua New Guinea.

Photo courtesy of Barry Oliver.

Northern and Milne Bay Mission, South Pacific Division

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The Northern and Milne Bay Mission (N&MBM) is the Seventh-day Adventist Church administrative entity for the Northern and Milne Bay areas of Papua New Guinea.¹

The Territory and Statistics of the Northern and Milne Bay Mission

The territory of the N&MBM is the “Milne Bay and Northern Provinces of Papua New Guinea.”² It is a part of and responsible to the Papua New Guinea Union Mission, 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 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 administrative office of N&MBM is located at Killerton Road, Popondetta 241, Papua New Guinea. The mailing address is P.O. Box 94, Popondetta 241, Papua New Guinea.

The N&MBM operates under General Conference and South Pacific Division (SPD) operating policies. Those policies state that the officers of N&MBP are elected by the Papua New Guinea Union Mission.³

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.⁴

Mission associate officers and departmental personnel are elected at a duly called session of the mission where representatives from all churches in the mission are present.⁵

In 2018, the N&MBP had forty-six organized churches and 196 companies. Church membership at the end of 2018 was 14,514. The mission had seventy-three active employees. Its tithe receipts for 2017 totaled US\$70,548. Its tithe and offerings per capita were US\$6.77.⁶

The Institutions of the Northern and Milne Bay Mission

As of 2018, the N&MBM operated nine primary or elementary schools and one secondary school with a total of 1,387 students and 107 teaching staff.⁷ Utukwaf Primary School is no longer being operated by the mission, reducing the number of primary schools to eight.⁸

The schools of the Northern and Milne Bay Mission including enrollment and staff in 2018 were:

Abuari Seventh-day Adventist Primary School is located at Abuari village, Kokoda district, Popondetta, Northern Province. No reports of enrollment or staff have been submitted in recent years.

Cape Siri Seventh-day Adventist Primary School, located at Sudest Island, Samarai/Misima district, Alotau, Milne Bay Province had fifty-seven students enrolled with one teaching staff member.

Embessa Seventh-day Adventist Primary School, located at Embessa village, Musa district, Popondetta, Northern Province, 164 students enrolled with four teaching staff.

Inonda Seventh-day Adventist High School, located in the Popondetta District, Northern Province, had 181 students enrolled with seven teaching staff.

Inonda Seventh-day Adventist Primary School, located in the Popondetta District, Northern Province had 268 students enrolled with seven teaching staff.

Kaisiga Seventh-day Adventist Primary School, located in the Trobriand Islands, Island district, Alotau, Milne Bay Province, had 186 students enrolled with four teaching staff.

Moiavi Seventh-day Adventist Primary School, located at Moiavi village, Musa district, Popondetta, Northern Province, had 101 students enrolled with two teaching staff.

Ramaga Seventh-day Adventist Primary School, located at Alotau District, Milne Bay Province had 178 students enrolled with seven teaching staff.

Tetebedi Seventh-day Adventist Primary School, located at Tetebedi village, Wamabe District, Popondetta, Northern Province, had fifty-five students enrolled with two teaching staff.

The Arrival and Early History of the Adventist Church in the Territory of the Mission

Septimus and Edith Carr, expatriate teachers at the Buresala Training School in Fiji, were nominated in 1907 to lead the establishment of the Adventist Church in Papua.⁹ They chose one of their students, Benisimani (known as Bennie or Benny) Tavodi, to assist them. They arrived in Port Moresby in June 1908 and found temporary accommodation there.¹⁰ Carr travelled to the Sogeri Plateau northeast of Port Moresby where he found a tract of land at Bisiatabu.¹¹ He applied to the government for permission to purchase 150 acres from the Koiari people so that he could lease it long term.¹² Late in 1909, these arrangements were completed. At the same time, help arrived in the persons of nursing graduates Gordon and Maud Smith along with Tuaine Solomona from the Cook Islands.¹³ Tavodi and Solomona did much of the hard labor, clearing and preparing the ground and planting taro, bananas, citrus and rubber trees.¹⁴ A mission home of local materials was erected which, together with the land, was dedicated on February 28, 1910.¹⁵

Septimus Carr reached Kokoda on the northern side of the Owen Stanley Ranges and in the territory of what is now the Northern and Milne Bay Mission just five years after arriving in the country. This was the first visit by Adventists to the territory of the Northern and Milne Bay Mission. He wrote, "SUNDAY, June 22, [1913] saw a string of carriers, men and women, leaving Bisiatabu, followed by Brother Lawson and myself."¹⁶ They spent a very short time at Kokoda before returning to Bisiatabu.

It was eleven years later, in November 1924, that William N. Lock expressed a desire to visit Kokoda. He said that "some day in the near future I plan to visit Kokoda, as I hope we shall see a mission station established at this place, thus holding the line of communication from sea to sea."¹⁷

His prophecy was fulfilled eighteen months later when he set out from Efogi on May 18, 1926, for Kokoda. In company with two village policemen, a young man from Bisiatabu and five carriers, they reached Kokoda on May 20. With his companions, Lock spent a number of days visiting villages in the area such as Oivi and Ilimo. They also visited villages in the Papaki District as well as a number of other villages before returning to Kokoda.

Lock reports that they received a very excited welcome, and that a block of land was offered for a mission station.¹⁸

For a time, Kokoda was administered by the Central Papuan Mission, but with the establishment of the Eastern Papua Mission with headquarters at Karasia Village, Yapuri River, Tufi, the Kokoda District became a district of the Eastern Papua Mission.

In 1936, Lester Lock recorded a pioneering trip to south eastern Papua on the *Diari*. On board were Pastor W. N. Lock, Lester Lock and his two brothers, and a ship's crew of six. Lester Lock was home during the year-end break at the Australasian Missionary College where he was a student. Not only did they visit the plantations and settlements along the coast, but they also canvassed Adventist books to traders and plantation owners as they went. They visited Samarai, Misima Island, Woodlark Island, a small island in the Trobriand Group, Ferguson Island, and Milne Bay. Lester Lock reported that "here along the coast of the mainland we called at a number of plantations and sold eight or nine books."¹⁹ This was the first encounter between Adventist and the people of Milne Bay and the island groups nearby.

During World War II, the United States 47th General Hospital was located at Milne Bay. It was reported that all of the medical personnel at the hospital were Seventh-day Adventists.²⁰ It is not known what contact there was between hospital personnel and the people of Milne Bay.

However, the organized work of the Seventh-day Adventist Church commenced in Milne Bay some fifteen years later when Laurence I. Howell and his wife arrived at Samarai early in 1959.²¹ Coral Sea Union President John Keith reported in December 1959:

Pastor L. I. Howell is already at Samarai developing a new interest in the Milne Bay district...Our representative has received a very warm welcome from the business fraternal, and invitations are coming in for him to visit some of the outlying districts. As soon as the boat is available Pastor Howell will set about developing this new mission.²²

By 1961, a Milne Bay District was established, attached to Coral Sea Union Mission as the Milne Bay District of Papua.²³ It was located at Gesila with Laurence Howell as the District Director.²⁴ In 1963, the Milne Bay Mission was organized. Laurence I. Howell was the first president.²⁵

Since the organization in 1972 of the North East Papua Mission which embraced all the territory of the present Northern and Milne Bay Mission, the church has grown as from eleven churches with 1,861 members to forty-six churches and 196 companies with 14,514 members as of 2018.²⁶

1972	11 Churches	1861 members ²⁷
1980	21 Churches	1558 members ²⁸

1990	31 Churches		4614 members ²⁹
2000	55 Churches	99 Companies	15912 members ³⁰
2010	41 Churches	119 Companies	10038 members ³¹
2018	46 Churches	196 Companies	14514 members ³²

Organizational History of the Adventist Church in North Eastern Papua New Guinea: Structure

The Adventist Church entered Papua in 1908 with the arrival of S. W. Carr and Peni Tavodi.³³ The Papua Mission was organized in 1928 with headquarters at Bisiatabu. W. N. Lock was the first superintendent.³⁴ In 1932, the Papua Mission's address changed to Bootless Bay, Port Moresby, Papua.³⁵ It changed again in 1935 when the mission moved to Mirigeda, Port Moresby, Papua.³⁶

The Papua-New Guinea Mission was formed in 1945. It included all the territory of the former Papua Mission and the former Territory of New Guinea Mission.³⁷ It was located in Port Moresby. The 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

In 1949, the Coral Sea Union Mission was organized with four local missions.⁴⁰ The Bismarck Archipelago Mission (formerly included in the Papua-New Guinea Mission, but organized as a separate mission in 1947), included the territory of New Britain, New Ireland, Bougainville, Buka, Saint Matthias Group, the Admiralty Group, and adjacent islands. The other three local missions were the Northeast New Guinea Mission, the Papuan Mission, and the Solomon Islands Mission.

With the formation of the Bismark Solomons Union Mission in 1953, four local Papua New Guinea missions were organized. The Bougainville Mission had headquarters in Inus with Cyril Pascoe, president. The Manus Mission with Karese Manovaki, president, comprised the island of Manus. The New Britain Mission had headquarters in Rabaul with Eric A. Boehm, president. The New Ireland Mission had headquarters in Kavieng John Rongapitu, president.⁴¹

The reorganized Coral Sea Union Mission included eight local missions. The Central Papuan Mission (reorganized in 1949 and renamed in 1954) established headquarters at Ela Beach, Port Moresby with Laurence I. Howell, president. The Eastern Highlands Mission (organized in 1953) had headquarters at Goroka with A. J. Campbell, president. The Eastern Papua Mission (organized in 1953) had headquarters at Tufi with Ngava, president. The Madang Mission (organized in 1949 and reorganized in 1953) maintained headquarters at Madang with T. F. Judd, president. The Morobe Mission (organized in 1953) had headquarters at Wau with John H. Newman, president.

The Sepik Mission (organized in 1953) had headquarters at Wewak with S. H. Gander, president. The Western Highlands Mission (organized in 1953) had headquarters at Mount Hagen with F. J. Maberly, president. The Western Papua Mission (organized in 1953) had headquarters at Port Romilly with H. Martin Pascoe, president.⁴²

In 1961, the Milne Bay District was separated from the Eastern Papua Mission. It was attached to Coral Sea Union Mission as the Milne Bay District of Papua.⁴³ It was located at Gesila and its postal address was PO Box 10, Samarai, Papua. The district director was Laurence I. Howell.⁴⁴ In 1963, the district was upgraded to a mission.⁴⁵

The Eastern Papua Mission was also renamed North Papuan Mission in 1963. The headquarters of the mission were at Karasia Village, Yapuri River, Tufi, Papua, New Guinea (near Popondetta).⁴⁶

In 1972, the Papua New Guinea Union Mission (PNGUM) was organized with ten local missions:⁴⁷ the Bougainville Mission, organized 1953; the Central Papuan Mission, organized 1908; the Eastern Highlands Mission, organized 1953; the Madang Manus Mission, organized 1949, and reorganized 1953 and 1972; the Morobe Mission, organized 1953; the New Britain New Ireland Mission, organized 1953, and reorganized 1961 and 1972; the North East Papuan Mission, organized 1953 and reorganized 1972; the Papuan Gulf Mission, organized 1954 and reorganized 1960; the Sepik Mission, organized 1953; and the Western Highlands Mission, organized 1953.⁴⁸ After the formation of the PNGUM and the reorganization of missions, 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. The North East Papua Mission established its administrative headquarters at Killerton Road, Popondetta 241, Papua New Guinea.

In 2016, the North East Papua Mission changed its name to Northern and Milne Bay Mission.⁴⁹

Organizational History of the Adventist Church in North Eastern Papua New Guinea: Union Affiliations

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. 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.

The North East of Papua within the Coral Sea Union Mission. In the reorganization of 1949, the Papuan Mission, which included the territory of northeastern Papua, 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."⁵⁰

Eastern Papua 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.⁵¹ The Eastern Papua Mission was part of the Coral Sea Union Mission.⁵² When the Milne Bay Mission was organized in 1963 it also became a part of the Coral Sea Union Mission and remained so until reorganization in 1972. When the Eastern Papua Mission changed its name to North Papua Mission in 1963 it remained part of the Coral Sea Union Mission until reorganization in 1972.

Affiliation with the Papua New Guinea Union Mission. Then In 1972, there was a major reorganization of the union missions in the Australasian Division. The North East Papua Mission was one of ten local missions in the Papua New Guinea Union Mission.⁵³ 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 1953; the Madang Manus Mission, organized in 1949, and reorganized in 1953 and 1972; the Morobe Mission, organized in 1953; the New Britain New Ireland Mission, organized in 1953, and reorganized in 1961 and 1972; the North East Papuan Mission, organized in 1953 and reorganized in 1972; the Papuan Gulf Mission, organized in 1954 and reorganized in 1960; the Sepik Mission, organized in 1953; and the Western Highlands Mission, organized in 1953.⁵⁴

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.⁵⁵

In 2000, another major reorganization of the unions in the South Pacific Division occurred at the South Pacific Division session.⁵⁶ 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 in the Territory of Northern and Milne Bay Mission Since 1929

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).

Eastern Papua Mission (1953-1963): Ngava Geda (1953-1961); Paul Jama (1962-1963).

Milne Bay District (1961-1963): Laurence I. Howell (1961-1963).

Milne Bay Mission (1963-1972): Laurence I. Howell (1963-1968); John R. Richardson (1969-1970); P. A. Miller (1971-1972).

North Papuan Mission (1963-1972): Paul Jama (1963-1972).

North East Papua Mission (1972-2018): P. A. Miller (1972-1974); Kala Uali (1975-1976); Ray Fraser (1977-1979); Clive D. Butcher (1980-1984); Luke Kavata (1984-1990); Donnie Andon (1991-1994); Samson Genun (1995-2000); Walter Oli (2002-2005); Peter Yorio (2005-2015); Leonard Sumatau (2016).

Northern and Milne Bay Mission (2016-): Leonard Sumatau (2016-).

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NOTES

1. The author acknowledges the contributions of Leonard Sumatau, Northern and Milne Bay Mission president, Mathias Foxsy, Northern and Milne Bay Mission secretary, and Pauline Yorio, PNGUM administrative assistant, in the compilation of information for this article. Much of the information in this article also 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).
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3. "ADM 10.05, Principles of Denominational Organization," in *South Pacific Division Working Policy* (Wahroonga, New South Wales: South Pacific Division, 2018).
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5. Ibid.
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