



The French Polynesia Mission office in Papeete, French Polynesia.

Photo courtesy of Maheata Adeline.

French Polynesia Mission

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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 French Polynesia Mission is a small mission in the territory of the New Zealand Pacific Union Mission of the South Pacific Division. Its headquarters are in Papeete, Tahiti, French Polynesia.

The Territory and Statistics of the French Polynesia Mission

The territory of the French Polynesia Mission includes the Australs, Gambier, Marquesas, the Society Islands, and the Tuamotu Archipelago.¹ It is a part of and reports to the New Zealand Pacific Union Conference which is based in Auckland, New Zealand. The New Zealand Pacific Union comprises the Seventh-day Adventist Church entities in the countries of New Zealand, New Caledonia, Cook Islands, French Polynesia, Pitcairn, and Wallis and Futuna Islands. The administrative office of the French Polynesia Mission is located at 55, Cours de l'Union Sacree, Papeete, Tahiti, French Polynesia. The postal address is B. P. 95-98713, Papeete Tahiti 98713, French Polynesia.

The French Polynesia Mission operates under General Conference and South Pacific Division (SPD) operating policies. Those policies state that the officers of the French Polynesia Mission are elected by the New Zealand Pacific Union Conference.² "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."³ 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.⁴

In the *2018 Annual Statistical Report of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists*, the French Polynesia Mission was listed as having 41 Churches and 18 companies. Church membership at the end of 2017 was 5259. The mission had 49 active employees. Its tithe receipts for 2016 totaled US\$3,199,719. Its tithe and offerings per capita were US\$658.98.⁵

The website for the Mission is <https://adventiste.pf>

The email of the mission is mission@adventiste.pf

The Institutions of the Mission

College Adventiste Tiarama, located at Fautaua in Papeete, was a fledgling school when first established in April 1962 with sixty pupils as the Tiaram School.⁶ By 1975, there were 120 students attending.⁷ Further classrooms were added and it enrolled two hundred students on February 16, 1978.⁸ In August 1983, the college sector of the Tiarama School was transferred to a new location high above the Tipaerui Valley in Papeete. It was named Collège du Pic Vert and began with 110 students. However, it proved to be an unpopular move because road access was steep and narrow. Rapidly declining numbers led to the school returning to the Fautaua site in 2001 when it was renamed Collège Tiarama.⁹ The Tiarama Primary School has continuously operated at Fautaua, Papeete, since it was established in 1962.

La Voix De L'esperanc (The Voice of Hope), the radio station located on the property of the mission office in Papeete, was established in 2006,¹⁰ but a radio ministry on FR3 Radio Tahiti with an affiliated Bible correspondence school had been functioning since 1976.¹¹

The Organizational History of the Mission

The Society Islands were originally organized as a part of the Eastern Polynesia Mission in 1904. The mission included the Society Islands, Pitcairn, and the Cook Islands.¹² A separate Central Polynesia Mission was formed in 1908 encompassing Fiji, Samoa, and the Friendly Islands (Tonga). The Eastern Polynesia Mission existed until 1942 when the territory of the Society Islands was again incorporated into a Society Islands Mission. The mission became a part of the Central Pacific Union Mission in 1949 and then, as the French Polynesia Mission, was incorporated into the New Zealand Pacific Union Conference after reorganization in 2000.

From the time that Albert and Hattie Read arrived in Papeete on the *Pitcairn* in 1892, until the Eastern Polynesian Mission was formally established, the Church work in the area was known as the "Society Islands Mission."¹³ At a council held in Raiatea on July 7-18 1904, Benjamin J. Cady, chairman of the Eastern Polynesian Mission reported, "At our last meeting, the plan was conceived to unite the interests of the various islands in this part of the Pacific, that we might be better able to assist one another in devising plans and raising funds for the carrying forward of the Third Angel's Message in this part of the world. An organization was therefore formed, and called the Eastern Polynesian Mission."¹⁴ This was the first formal organization of these territories, although each entity within this mission was in its infancy.

At the Australasian Union Conference Council, which confirmed the later establishment of a Central Polynesia Mission in 1908—with headquarters in Fiji and territory comprising Fiji, Tonga, and Samoa—various terms were used to describe the eastern area of Polynesia including Eastern Polynesian Field,¹⁵ Eastern Polynesian District,¹⁶ and Eastern Polynesian Mission.¹⁷ Neither the Eastern Polynesian Mission nor the Central Polynesian Mission were listed in the *Yearbook* between 1909 and 1916. Rather, two advisory mission committees were listed, one for the Eastern Polynesian Union Mission and one for the Central Polynesian Union Mission. In 1912 and 1913, the Central Polynesian Union Mission advisory committee was designated as the Western Polynesian Union Mission advisory committee. Throughout this period, 1909 to 1916, each local mission, including the Society Islands Mission, continued to be listed as a separate entity with no affiliation to the Eastern Polynesian Mission or the Central Polynesian Mission indicated. It is obvious that there was a great deal of inconsistency in the names and designations used for the various organizational entities of the Church.¹⁸

In 1916, the Central Polynesian Mission was organized into the Central Polynesian Conference comprising Samoa, Fiji, Tonga, and Niue. This action was first considered by the Australasian Union Conference Council in September 1916,¹⁹ and then discussed and voted at a specially called council at Suva Vou, Fiji, commencing on October 5, 1916.²⁰ The office of the conference was located at Suva Vou.²¹ Calvin H. Parker was elected

president, Joseph E. Steed became secretary, and John E. Nash became treasurer.²² This was the first time that the organizational designation "conference" was used for an Adventist Church organization in the Pacific Islands. Because it was a part of the Eastern Polynesia Mission, the Society Islands were not a part of this conference.

Although the status of the Eastern Polynesian Mission did not change in 1916, it was listed in the *Yearbook* for the first time.²³ It was reported as comprising "the following former missions: Society Islands, Cook Islands, and Pitcairn Island."²⁴ Its territory encompassed "all the Pacific Islands east of the 160th degree of west longitude, and south of the tenth Parallel of north latitude."²⁵ The headquarters for the mission were in Papeete, Tahiti, and the mission officers were F. E. Lyndon, superintendent and treasurer, and H. A. Hill, Secretary.²⁶

By 1922, the Central Polynesian Conference was no longer listed in the *Yearbook*; rather, once again each mission in the region was listed individually with the note: "included as part of the Central Polynesian Conference, 1916 to 1921; reorganized 1921."²⁷ The Eastern Polynesian Mission continued to be listed until 1942,²⁸ although the Cook Islands were designated as a separate mission in 1923. A note under the heading 'Cook Islands Mission' in the 1924 *Yearbook* said that the Cook Islands Mission was "included as part of the Eastern Polynesian Mission, 1916 to 1923; reorganized 1923."²⁹ The Eastern Polynesia Mission continued to be listed as comprising just the Society Islands (French Polynesia) and Pitcairn Island.³⁰

As of 1943, the mission was once again called "Society Islands Mission." It continued to comprise "the following former missions: Society Islands, and Pitcairn Island." Its territory was: "All the Pacific Islands east of the 160th degree of west longitude, and south of the tenth parallel of north latitude." At this stage there were nine churches with 273 members.³¹

Until 1949, all of the local conference and mission entities in the Australasian Union Conference, including the Society Islands, reported directly to the union conference. 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 into 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 Central Pacific Union Mission included the Society Islands along with the New Hebrides, New Caledonia, Fiji, the Gilbert and Ellice groups, the Cook Islands, Samoa, Niue, Nauru, Society Islands, and Pitcairn.³² Thus, as of that time, the Society Islands Mission was administered by an entity that had not previously existed: the Central Pacific Union Mission. This allowed for a much more consultative approach. Whereas, previously the relationship was directly to an entity in Australia, now the relationship was directly to an entity in the Pacific itself. The headquarters of the union were in Fiji rather than Sydney, Australia.

Up until 1949, the territory of the mission had been stated as: "All the Pacific Islands east of the 160th degree of west longitude, and south of the tenth Parallel of north latitude."³³ However after 1949, the territory was expressed as: Society Islands, Leeward Group, Marquesas, Northern and Southern Tuamotus, Austral Group,

and Mangareva.”³⁴

A change of name was recorded in 1952. In the *Yearbook* for that year the mission was named the “French Oceania Mission.”³⁵ Another change occurred in 1960 when the mission was designated as the “French Polynesia Mission.”³⁶ It has retained that name ever since.

National leadership began in 1976 when Lazare Doom was elected president,³⁷ followed by Marcel Doom in 1984.³⁸ These men vigorously carried the evangelistic and educational programs forward. By 1980, there were over two thousand baptized members spread among eighteen churches.³⁹

In 2000, a major reorganization of the unions in the South Pacific Division occurred at the Division session.⁴⁰ The number of unions in the division was reduced from five to four. A New Zealand Pacific Union Conference was formed.⁴¹ The French-speaking missions of the South Pacific Division were designated as parts of that Union.

French Polynesia Mission Superintendents/Directors⁴²

Society Islands Mission (1892–1904):

A. J. Read (1892-1894); Benjamin Cady (1894-1904)

Eastern Polynesia Mission (1904–1942):

B. J. Cady (1904-1910); Frank E. Lyndon (1910-1926); H. P. Martin (1927); Frank E. Lyndon (1928-1930); G. L. Sterling (1931-1937); P. J. Wright (1938-1941); F. Hollingsworth (1942)

Society Islands Mission (1942–1952):

Bernard E. Hadfield (1943); J. B. Keith (1944); H. B. P. Wicks (1945); R. N. Heggie (1946-1948); Vacant, 1949); Charles Flohr (Acting 1950); M. P. Nouan (1951-1952)

French Oceania Mission (1952–1960):

M. P. Nouan (1952-1954); E. J. Landa (1955-1959)

French Polynesia Mission (1960–):

Ernest Vuethy (1960-1963); Marcel Bornert (1964-1967); R. V. Esposito (1968-1974); Jean Surel (1975-1976); Lazare Doom (1977-1984); Marcel Doom (1985-1998); Marama Tuariihionia (1999-2011); Roger Tetuanui (2012-)

SOURCES

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NOTES

1. *Seventh-day Adventist Online Yearbook*. Accessed February 3, 2019, <https://www.adventistyearbook.org/entity?EntityID=13288>.
2. "ADM 10.05, Principles of Denominational Organization," in *South Pacific Division Working Policy* (Wahroonga, NSW: South Pacific Division, 2018).
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.

5. *2018 Annual Statistical Report: 154th Report of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists for 2016 and 2017*, accessed January 20, 2019, <http://documents.adventistarchives.org/Statistics/ASR/ASR2018.pdf>.
6. E. Veuthey, "First Adventist School in Tahiti," *Australasian Record and Advent World Survey*, February 11, 1963, 3.
7. Mavina Haumani, "History of the Tiarama Schools - Adventist Education on the Island of Tahiti in French Polynesia," *Journal of Pacific Adventist History* 8, no. 1 (September 2008): 32-34.
8. R. Swendson, "New School Opens in Tahiti," *Australasian Record and Advent World Survey*, April 10, 1978, 5.
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12. E. M. Graham, "The Eastern Polynesian Mission," *Union Conference Record*, September 7, 1908, 7.
13. A. J. Read, "The Work in the Islands," *The Bible Echo*, December 1, 1892, 364-365.
14. E. H. Gates, "Eastern Polynesian Mission Conference," *Union Conference Record*, September 1, 1904, 2-3.
15. "Index to this Number," *Union Conference Record*," September 7, 1908, 44.
16. "Australasian Union Conference: Advance Moves," *Union Conference Record*," September 7, 1908, 3.
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18. For example, see "Australasian Union Conference," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1909), 92.
19. "Decisions of the Union Conference Council, Held August 29 to September 12, 1916," *Australasian Record*, September 25, 1916, 5.
20. W. J. Westerman, "Organization of Central Polynesian Conference," *Australasian Record*, November 6, 1916, 2.
21. "Central Polynesian Mission," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1917), 143.
22. *Ibid.*

23. "Eastern Polynesian Mission," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1917), 144.
24. Ibid.
25. Ibid.
26. Ibid.
27. "Cook Islands Mission," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1924), 175.
28. "Eastern Polynesian Mission," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1942), 61.
29. For example, see "Fiji Mission," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook*, (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1925), 188.
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31. "Society Islands Mission," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1943), 71.
32. H. E. Piper, "Special Session, Australasian Union Conference," *Australasian Record*, September 13, 1948, 2-3.
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34. "Society Islands Mission," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1949), 75.
35. "French Oceania Mission," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1952), 85.
36. "French Polynesia Mission," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1960), 75.
37. "French Polynesia Mission," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1977), 122.
38. "French Polynesia Mission," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 2002), 62.
39. Ibid.
40. Bruce Manners, "Session Votes for Restructure," *Record* (South Pacific Division), November 25, 2000, 8-9.
41. Ibid.; "Trans-Pacific Union Mission," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 2002), 310.
42. There is sometimes a short time delay with dates as given in the *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook*. In some cases, an appointment was made late in the previous year and by the time the General Conference was notified it was already the following year.

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