



Cook Islands Mission office, Rarotonga, Cook Islands.

Photo courtesy of Eric Toleafoa.

# Cook Islands Mission

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## 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.

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The Cook Islands Mission is a part of, and responsible to the New Zealand Pacific Union Conference. The administrative office of the mission is located at Titikaveka, Rarotonga, Cook Islands. Its postal address is PO Box 31, Rarotonga, Cook Islands.

The mission operates under General Conference and the South Pacific Division of the General Conference operating policies. Those policies state that the officers of the Cook Islands Mission are elected by the New Zealand Pacific Union Conference.<sup>1</sup> “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.”<sup>2</sup>

The territory of the Cook Islands Mission is: “Cook Islands and adjoining islands.”<sup>3</sup>

In the *2018 Annual Statistical Report of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists*, the Cook Islands Mission was listed as having 15 Churches and 2 companies. Church membership at the end of 2017 was 1000, the first time the membership had risen to 1000.<sup>4</sup> The mission had 28 active employees. Its tithe receipts for 2017 totaled US\$336,757. Its tithe and offerings per capita were US\$350.42.<sup>5</sup>

## The Institutions of the Mission

The Cook Islands Mission operates two schools:

Papaaroa Adventist College. Situated at Titikaveka on the island of Rarotonga, the school was established in 1938.<sup>6</sup> The school offers early childhood education, primary education, and secondary education.<sup>7</sup> The postal address is PO Box 31, Rarotonga, Cook Islands.

Tekaaroa Adventist School. Situated on the island of Aitutaki, the school was established in 1975.<sup>8</sup> The postal address is PO Box 60, Arutanga, Aitutaki, Cook Islands.

Various local schools have come and gone during the history of the mission, the most recent being a school that was operated by the local church on the island of Atui.<sup>9</sup>

The only other institution of the mission is a radio station broadcasting Hope Radio.<sup>10</sup> Until 1987, the mission broadcast a "Voice of Prophecy" radio program that was produced locally.<sup>11</sup>

## The Organizational History of the Mission

Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) missionaries first arrived in the Cook Islands in 1891 aboard the mission ship *Pitcairn*, calling at Mangaia, Rarotonga, and Aitutaki.<sup>12</sup> Further visits took place during the subsequent five voyages of the *Pitcairn* during the 1890s. The first SDA missionaries to settle on Rarotonga came with the *Pitcairn* on its third voyage in September 1894.<sup>13</sup>

While statistical reports were somewhat inconsistent, it appears that church membership remained somewhat static over the ensuing 20 years. By 1915, the Cook Islands Mission had a membership of only sixteen in one organized church congregation.<sup>14</sup> Pastor G. L. Sterling was the superintendent of the mission with Mrs G. L. Sterling, H. Streeter, and a young Harold Wicks granted missionary licenses.<sup>15</sup>

Then in 1916 there was a major reorganization of the missions within the territory of the Australasian Union Conference. A Central Polynesian Conference was formed comprising Fiji, Samoa, Tonga, and Niue.<sup>16</sup> A Melanesian Mission was formed "comprising New Caledonia, Loyalty Islands, New Hebrides, Torres Islands, Banks Group, Santa Cruz Islands, Solomon Islands, Bismark Archipelago, Eastern New Guinea, and adjacent islands, and also Lord Howe and Norfolk Islands."<sup>17</sup> An Eastern Polynesia Mission was also formed that included The Cook Islands along with the Society Islands, and Pitcairn. Its territory was described as "all the Pacific Islands

east of the 160<sup>th</sup> degree of west longitude and south of the tenth parallel of south latitude.<sup>18</sup> The headquarters of this expansive mission were in Papeete, Tahiti and the superintendent was Frank E. Lyndon.<sup>19</sup> The statistical report for 1917 indicated that across this extensive territory, the Church had only 180 members in 5 local congregations.<sup>20</sup>

The territory of the Cook Islands was separated from the Eastern Polynesian Mission in 1923 and was organized into the Cook Islands Mission. Tahiti and Pitcairn remained in the Eastern Polynesia Mission. The territory of the Cook Islands Mission was described as: “those islands comprising the Cook or Hervey Group, and other small islands closely adjoining.” Its headquarters postal address was Box 16, Rarotonga, Cook Islands, Pacific Ocean.<sup>21</sup> It was administered directly under the supervision of the Australasian Union Conference and the superintendent at the time was Henry A. Hill.<sup>22</sup>

It remained this way until the beginning of 1949 when as part of a major reorganization of the Australasian Union Conference and the formation of unions within the Australasian Inter-Union Conference, the Cook Islands Mission was included as part of the Central Pacific Union Mission.<sup>23</sup> At that time the mission had 232 members, 8 churches, 4 ministers, 2 licensed missionaries and 5 “native teachers.”<sup>24</sup> The president at the time was J. E. Cormack.<sup>25</sup>

With a further major reorganization of the Union Conferences of the South Pacific Division in 2000, the Cook Islands Mission became part of the New Zealand Pacific Union Conference which has its headquarters in Auckland, New Zealand.<sup>26</sup> Statistics for the first year after the reorganization indicated the mission had 783 members, 15 churches, 4 ordained ministers, 4 credentialed missionaries, and 3 credentialed, commissioned ministers of teaching. The president was Uma Katu, the first Cook Islander to be president of the mission.<sup>27</sup>

## Mission Directors (1903-1916)

G. F. Jones (1903); A. H. Piper (1904-1905); W. H. Pascoe (1907); F. K. Lyndon (1908); George L. Sterling (1909-1916)

In 1916, the Cook Islands were incorporated into the Eastern Polynesia Mission

## Mission Superintendents (1923-1949)

Henry Hill (1923-1926); George L. Sterling (1927); Harold Wicks (1928-1937); Arthur Jacobson (1938-1941); L. G. Maxwell (1942); James Cormack (1943-1948)

## Mission Presidents (1949-)

James Cormack (1949-1952); Joseph Miller (1953-1958); Walter Ferris (1959); Ron Heggie (1960-1961); Gordon Lee (1962-1967); Ernie Lemke (1968-1970); Graham Coombs (1970 acting); Ken Gray (1971-1972); George Porter

(1973-1980); David Hay (1981-1988); Alwyn Gersbach (1989-1991); Saula Ratu (1992-1994); Kevin Geelan (1995-1999); Uma Katu (2000-2007); Eliu Eliu (2008-)

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