



First Headquarters building in Suva for the Central Pacific Union Mission

Photo courtesy of South Pacific Division Heritage Centre.

Central Pacific Union Mission, Australasian Division and 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 Pacific Union Mission (CPUM) existed between 1949 and 2000. It was a constituent union of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists and in the South Pacific Division of the General Conference (SPD). When it was dissolved, its headquarters were at 357 Princess Road, Tamavua, Fiji Islands.

The CPUM underwent periods of reorganization, but at the time of its dissolution the territory of the CPUM was "American Samoa, Cook Islands, Fiji, French Polynesia, Isle of Pine, Loyalty Islands, New Caledonia, Niue, Pitcairn,

Tokelau, Tonga, Tuvalu, Western Samoa, and Wallis and Futuna Islands; comprising the Cook Islands, Fiji, French Polynesia, New Caledonia, Samoa, Tonga and Niue, and Tuvalu Missions, and the Pitcairn Attached Church.⁴

In the annual statistical report for 2000, the Central Pacific Union Mission was listed as having six missions, one attached field, and one attached church with a total of 232 church congregations and 136 companies. Church membership at the end of 1999 was 33,215. The union had a total of 398 active employees in its entities. The total tithe receipts for the union in 1999 were US\$3,121,882. Its tithe and offerings per capita were US\$111.56.²

Institutions and Services of the Central Pacific Union Mission

Fulton College grew out of the Fiji Training Institute which began as an industrial school in 1905 at Buresala on the island of Ovalau.³ By 1939, the church was operating four training schools in Fiji, but in 1940 it was decided to consolidate and land was purchased at Tailevu, about 32 miles from Suva.⁴ In 1940, the Buresala Training School and the Wainibuka Central School at Navuso were closed and the boarding functions of the Samabula Indian school were transferred to Tailevu to become the new Fulton Missionary School.⁵ The name gradually changed during the Fulton Missionary College during the 1940s.⁶ In the early 1970s, the term “missionary” was omitted and the college was known as Fulton College.

Organizational History of the Central Pacific Union Mission

The territory encompassed by the CPUM had, before its creation in 1949, experienced a number of major organizational realignments since the Seventh-day Adventist Church first established itself in the South Pacific region in 1885. Soon after Adventists commenced work in the South Pacific region, an Australasian Union Conference was organized during the time of the Australian camp meeting, January 15-25, 1894. It comprised District 7 of the General Conference, and included just the local conferences of Australia and New Zealand. It was in fact, the first union conference organized in the global Seventh-day Adventist Church. The stated object of the union was “to unify and extend the work of the third angel's message, under the general direction of the General Conference, in the Australasian field.”⁷ Gradually, the island territories of the South Pacific were added to its responsibility as the Church commenced working in those territories.

Until 1949, the Australasian Union Conference, also designated as the Australasian Division, operated as a collection of conferences and missions, including all of the entities which formed the CPUM.⁸ In 1949, four unions were organized within the territory of the division, which was also known as the Australasian Inter-Union Conference:⁹ “1. Central Pacific Union Mission with headquarters in Suva, Fiji; 2. Coral Sea Union Mission with headquarters in Lae, Papua New Guinea; 3. Trans-Commonwealth Union Conference with headquarters in Melbourne, Victoria; and 4. Trans-Tasman Union Conference with headquarters in Gordon, New South Wales.”¹⁰

By 1953, it was decided that the territory of the Coral Sea Union Mission would be better developed by being formed into two union territories. The result was that the Bismarck-Solomons Union Mission was created with headquarters at Rabaul, Mandated Territory of New Guinea. This meant that there were now five unions in the Australasian Division.¹¹ At the end of 1971, the division's mission territories were reorganized. Three of the five unions were designated as union missions: "1. Papua New Guinea Union Mission with headquarters in Lae, Papua New Guinea; 2. Western Pacific Union Mission with headquarters in Honiara, British Solomon Islands; and 3. Central Pacific Union Mission with headquarters in Suva, Fiji. The reorganization into the new Unions became effective April 1, 1972."¹² In December 1972, an action was taken to transfer the headquarters of the new Central Pacific Union Mission to Auckland, New Zealand, from Suva, Fiji.¹³ The Central Pacific Union Mission did not include the conferences in New Zealand. But for a number of reasons it was deemed more efficient to administer the local missions of the Central Pacific Union from Auckland rather than from Suva.¹⁴ The transfer of the union headquarters was complete by January 1974. The union headquarters returned to Fiji in February 1987 when a renewed office was opened at Tamavua, Suva, Fiji.¹⁵

In 2000, a major reorganization of the unions in the South Pacific Division occurred at the division session.¹⁶ The number of unions in the division was reduced from five to four. The Central Pacific Union Mission and the Western Pacific Union Mission were largely combined to form the Trans Pacific Union Mission at that time. When first voted, it was named the Western Pacific Union Mission.¹⁷ A change of name was voted at the first session of the amalgamated union on November 15-18, 2000, at the Fulton College campus, Tailevu, Fiji.¹⁸

List of Executive Officers of CPUM

Presidents: Gordon Branster (1949-1957); O. D. F. McCutcheon (1958-1962); Ronald W. Taylor (1963-1965); Gordon A. Lee (1966-1969); Donald E. G. Mitchell (1970-1979); Rex E. Cobbin (1980-1986); Colin M. Winch (1987-1990); Aisake Kabu (1990-1993); David E. Hay (1993-1995); Stenio Gungadoo (1995-2000).

Secretaries: E. W. Howse (1949-1955); W. H. Simmonds (1956-1961); A. G. Gilbert (1962-1968); K. E. Watts (1969-1979); H. J. Tressler (1980-1985); Ripini F. Rimoni (1986-1987); Aisake Kabu (1988-1990); David Hay (1990-1993); Fonua Ofa (1994-2000).

Treasurers: E. W. Howse (1949-1955); W. H. Simmonds (1956-1961); A. G. Gilbert (1962-1968); K. E. Watts (1969-1979); H. J. Tressler (1980-1987); Ronald L. Herbert (1988-1989); Arthur J. Petrie (1990-1993); Rodney G. Brady (1994-1997); Kingsley Wood (1998-2000).

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NOTES

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2. *2000 Annual Statistical Report of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists*, accessed February 15, 2020, <http://documents.adventistarchives.org/Statistics/ASR/ASR2000.pdf>
3. "The address of J. E. Fulton . . .," *Union Conference Record*, June 15, 1905, 7. A. G. Stewart, "Visiting in Fiji," *Australasian Record*, August 28, 1940, 3.
4. E. B. Rudge, "The Fulton Missionary School," *Australasian Record*, January 6, 1941, 3.
5. Eva E. Edwards, "General Meeting at Fulton Missionary College," *Australasian Record*, September 24, 1945, 4.

6. *Seventh-day Adventist Online Yearbook*, "Australasian Union Conference," accessed April 30, 2018, <http://documents.adventistarchives.org/Yearbooks/YB1894.pdf>
7. H. E. Piper, "Special Session, Australasian Union Conference," *Australasian Record*, September 13, 1948, 2-3.
8. Ibid.
9. Ibid.
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16. Ibid.
17. "WPUM to Become TPUM," *Record*, December 8, 2000, 2; A. Larsen, Secretary of the TPUM, email to author, April 25, 2019.

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