



Fiji Mission Headquarters Office, Suva via Suva, Fiji Islands.

Photo courtesy of Pete Navosailagi.

## Fiji 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 Fiji Mission is a constituent of the Trans Pacific Union Mission which is based in Tamavua, Suva, Fiji Islands. The Trans Pacific Union includes the Seventh-day Adventist Church entities in the countries of American Samoa, Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, Niue, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tokelau, Tonga, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu.

### The Territory and Statistics of the Fiji Mission

The territory of the Fiji Mission is the islands of Fiji, including Rotuma.<sup>1</sup> The administrative office of the Fiji mission is located at 37 Queens Road, Lami, Suva, Fiji Islands.<sup>2</sup> The mission operates under General Conference

and South Pacific Division (SPD) operating policies. Those policies state that the officers of the Fiji Mission are elected by the Trans Pacific Union Mission.<sup>3</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>4</sup> 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.<sup>5</sup>

In the *2018 Annual Statistical Report of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists*, the Fiji Mission was listed as having 166 Churches and 101 companies. Church membership at the end of 2017 was 26,593. The mission had 98 active employees. Its tithe receipts for 2016 totaled US\$2,164,685. Its tithe and offerings per capita were US\$111.31.<sup>6</sup>

## The Institutions of the Mission

The Fiji Mission administers a number of institutions which have been established in order to enable the accomplishment of the mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Fiji. These institutions include thirteen schools,<sup>7</sup> a bookstore, the Hope Channel, an ADRA office, and a youth summer camp.

Lautoka Adventist Primary School, located at M. T. Khan Road, Waiyavi Stage 2, Lautoka, has an enrollment of 328 in grades 1 to 8 with eight teaching staff.

Lewa Adventist Primary School, located at Lewa Village, Nadarivatu, has an enrollment of 80 in kindergarten to grade 8 with six teaching staff.

Mana Adventist Primary School, located on Mana Island, has an enrollment of 57 in grades 1 to 8 with five teaching staff.

Nagigi Adventist Primary School, located at Nagigi Village, Savusavu, on the island of Vanua Levu, has an enrollment of 104 in grades 1 to 8 with five teaching staff.

Naqaqa Adventist Primary School, previously known as Fulton primary, is located at Namara, Saivou, Ra, and has an enrollment of 117 in kindergarten to grade 8 with six teaching staff.

Naqarawai Adventist Primary School is a boarding school located at Naqarawai Village, Namosi, on the island of Viti Levu, with an enrollment of 113 in kindergarten to grade 8 with five teaching staff.

Naqia Adventist Primary School, located at Naqia Village, Wainibuka, Tailevu, on the island of Viti Levu, has an enrollment of 80 in grades 1 to 8 with five teaching staff.

Navesau Adventist High School, located on the Kings Road, Wainibuka on the island of Viti Levu, its postal address is P.O. Box 23, Nayavu, Wainibuka, Fiji. It has an enrollment of 376 in grades 9-13 and 22 teaching staff.

Nelson Palmer Adventist Primary School, located at Waiyala, Navosa, on the island of Viti Levu, has an enrollment of 152 in grades 1 to 8 with six teaching staff.

Suva Adventist College, located on the Queens Road, Lami, Fiti on the island of Viti Levu, its postal address is P.O. Box 15730, Suva, Fiji. It has an enrollment of 237 in grades 8 to 11, and an enrollment of 18 in Foundation Studies, with 26 teaching staff.

Suva Adventist Primary School, located at 37 Queens Road, Lami, Suva, on the island of Viti Levu, has an enrollment of 690 in grades 1 to 8 with 16 teaching staff.

Vatuvonu Adventist College, located in Buca Bay on the island of Vanua Levu, has an enrollment of 181 in grades 8 to 12, with 22 teaching staff.

Wainunu Adventist Primary School, located at Nakabuta Village, Bua, on the island of Vanua Levu, has an enrollment of 72 in kindergarten to grade 7 with a teaching staff of four.

An Adventist Book Centre operates from the mission headquarters office at 37 Queens Road Lami, Suva, Fiji.

Hope Channel began broadcasting in Fiji on February 22, 2013. However, the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Fiji, has been operating a radio station called Hope FM for the last 14 years. Both radio and TV are now part of Hope Channel Fiji, and since its commissioning on May 3, 2015, the Hope Channel studio has been sharing positive Bible-based messages throughout Fiji.<sup>8</sup> Hope Channel Fiji includes Hope Radio<sup>9</sup> offering 24/7 radio programming,

Hope TV<sup>10</sup> offering 24/7 TV programming, and Hope Discover<sup>11</sup> offering Bible discovery courses that may be accessed on line.

Adventist Development and Relief Agency Fiji is an implementing country office of ADRA International. The office is located at 37 Queens Road, Lami, Suva, Fiji.<sup>12</sup>

The Fiji Mission operates a youth camp at Victor Harbour, Viti Levu.

## Institutions of the Trans Pacific Union Mission Located in the Territory of the Fiji Mission

The origin's of Fulton Adventist University College,<sup>13</sup> date back to 1905 when property for an Adventist training school in Fiji was secured at Buresala on the island of Ovalau and the Buresala Training School was opened. Other training institutions were later established in Navuso (Wainibuka, Viti Levu), Samabula (Suva) and Vatuvonu (Vanua Levu). In order to respond to rising educational standards and to overcome the inconvenience of the Ovalau and Navuso sites, the Church decided to consolidate their educational work in Fiji. A site on King's Road in Tailevu, about 50 kilometers from Suva, was secured and the relocation and construction of Fulton

College commenced in 1940. A number of buildings from the old school sites in Buresala and Navuso were dismantled, transported to the new site, and reconstructed. The new institution, named in honor of John E. Fulton, opened in 1941 and quickly drew students from all parts of the South Pacific. In 2014, Fulton College relocated to a new property on the western side of the island of Viti Levu at Sabeto near Nadi Airport.<sup>14</sup>

## The Organizational History of the Mission

The Fiji Mission was initially organized as a part of the Central Polynesia Mission in 1908. The mission included Tonga and Samoa. A separate Eastern Polynesia Mission, formed in 1904, contained the Society Islands, Pitcairn, and the Cook Islands. The Central Polynesia mission was organized into a conference in 1916. However, it was disbanded in 1921 and the name “Fiji Mission” was again used for Fiji until 1951. In 1949, the mission became part of the Central Pacific Union Mission and, in 2000, a reorganization made it part of the Trans Pacific Union Mission. In 1951, the mission was separated into the West Fiji Mission and the East Fiji Mission. In 1965, it was once again unified as one mission and has remained so.

After the arrival of the missionary ship *Pitcairn* to Suva, Fiji, on August 3, 1891, John and Hannah Tay remained in Suva to sell medical books. They were well received by the Europeans and sold their entire stock of books and began preaching in public halls or Wesleyan pulpits.<sup>15</sup> The Tays intended to establish a base for the Church, but John Tay died on January 8, 1892.<sup>16</sup>

Some two years passed before, in 1894, Americans John and Fanny Cole arrived. Then in May 1896, John and Susie Fulton and their family joined them.<sup>17</sup> The Coles returned to America in 1897 because of ill-health, and the Fultons were joined by Calvin and Myrtle Parker in 1898.<sup>18</sup>

Fulton and Parker began visiting Suvavou, a village across the harbor from Suva, and after negotiations with the people and the chief, the Fultons and the Parkers moved their homes there in early 1899.<sup>19</sup> Soon after, a small group commenced meeting together on Sabbath and formed the first church company in Fiji.<sup>20</sup> Suva Vou soon became the center of Church operations in Fiji.

Between November 2 and 5, 1903, the first Church Council was convened at Suva Vou.<sup>21</sup> The meeting was chaired by John Fulton. Matters on the agenda included medical missionary work in Fiji, a request that union with Tonga and Samoa be discussed, and that a Fijian hymn book be prepared.

In February 1905, a training school for indigenous workers opened at Buresala on the island of Ovalau. There were just ten students on the first day. Soon four more students arrived, and by the end of the first year enrollment had risen to fifteen students.<sup>22</sup> Towards the end of the year it was decided to move the mission headquarters and the printing press from Suva Vou to Buresala.<sup>23</sup> This change proved somewhat temporary. By 1912, the mission headquarters were back at Suva Vou where they have remained ever since.<sup>24</sup>

At the Fijian Council in July 1908, a Central Polynesian Mission comprising Tonga, Samoa, and Fiji was formed.<sup>25</sup> C. H. Parker was appointed chairman, J. E. Steed directed the work in Samoa, and W. W. Palmer in Tonga. C. H. Parker also was continued as president of the Fiji territory.<sup>26</sup> Action to confirm the organization of the Central Polynesian Mission was taken at the Seventh Biennial session of the Australasian Union Conference held in August 1908.<sup>27</sup> Meanwhile, Andrew G. Stewart and his wife had arrived at Buresala, where Stewart served as secretary of the mission.

It appears that the term "Fiji Mission" had come into use at the time of the Australasian Union Conference council which was held in the Cooranbong, New South Wales, church, commencing on July 11, 1901. The proceedings of the council were reported in the *Union Conference Record* of July 17, 1901.<sup>28</sup> John Fulton was present at that Council. It was his first time on Australian soil.<sup>29</sup> However, there is no record of any formal organization of a Fiji Mission prior to that time. The term, which although it does appear in the *Yearbook*, was one of popular usage rather than denominational designation. The establishment of the Central Polynesian Mission and the inclusion of the Fiji Mission appears to be the first time that the territory of the Fiji Islands is included in a voted organizational entity of the Church.

The creation of the Central Polynesian Mission was preceded by the creation of an Eastern Polynesian Mission comprised of the Society Islands, with Pitcairn and the Cook group.<sup>30</sup> At a council held in Raiatea, July 7-18 1904, B. 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."<sup>31</sup>

Strangely, at the same Australasian Union Conference council which confirmed the establishment of the Central Polynesian Mission, various terms were used to describe the eastern area of Polynesia: Eastern Polynesian Field,<sup>32</sup> Eastern Polynesian District,<sup>33</sup> and Eastern Polynesian Mission.<sup>34</sup>

Also, strangely, there is no listing in the *Yearbook* during these years for either an Eastern Polynesian Mission or a Central Polynesian Mission. Rather, beginning in 1909 and lasting until 1916, two advisory mission committees are listed: one for the Eastern Polynesian Union Mission and one for the Central Polynesian Union Mission. For some reason, in 1912 and 1913 the Central Polynesian Union Mission advisory committee was designated as the Western Polynesian Union Mission advisory committee. Throughout this period each local mission, including the Fiji Mission, continued to be listed as a separate entity with no affiliation to an Eastern Polynesian Mission or Central Polynesian Mission mentioned. Certainly, there does not appear to be any reference to these two missions being designated as union missions, except in the name given to the advisory committees. 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.<sup>35</sup>



In 1916, the Central Polynesian Mission was organized into the Central Polynesian Conference comprising Fiji, Samoa, Tonga, and Niue. This action was first considered by the Australasian Union Conference council in September 1916,<sup>36</sup> and then discussed and voted at a specially called council at Suva Vou, Fiji, commencing on October 5, 1916.<sup>37</sup> The office of the conference was located at Suva Vou.<sup>38</sup> The elected president was C. H. Parker, the secretary J. E. Steed and the treasurer J. E. Nash<sup>39</sup>

The status of the Eastern Polynesian Mission did not change at the time. It was not formed into a conference. Rather it was reported as comprising "the following former missions: Society Islands, Cook Islands, and Pitcairn Island."<sup>40</sup> Its territory encompassed: "All the Pacific Islands east of the 160th degree of west longitude, and south of the tenth Parallel of north latitude."<sup>41</sup> The headquarters for the mission were in Papeete, Tahiti, and the mission officers were F. E. Lyndon, superintendent; H. A. Hill, secretary; and F. E. Lyndon, treasurer.<sup>42</sup>

The Central Polynesian Conference was no longer listed in the *Yearbook* by 1922. Rather, there was once again a specific listing for a Fiji Mission. A comment under the heading read: "included as part of the Central Polynesian Conference, 1916 to 1921; reorganized 1921."<sup>43</sup>

However, the Eastern Polynesian Mission did continue to be listed right up until 1942.<sup>44</sup> There was a change in its territory however. In 1923, the Cook Islands was designated as a separate mission. 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."<sup>45</sup> The Eastern Polynesia Mission continued to be listed as comprising just the Society Islands (French Polynesia) and Pitcairn Island.<sup>46</sup>

Until 1949, all of the local conference and mission entities in the Australasian Union Conference, including Fiji, reported directly to that union. But at a specially called session of the Australian 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 Tonga, along with the New Hebrides, New Caledonia, Fiji, the Gilbert and Ellice groups, the Cook Islands, Samoa, Niue, Nauru, Society Islands, and Pitcairn.<sup>47</sup>

The Fiji Mission operated as an organizational entity until 1951 when another major change occurred. In that year the Fiji Mission was separated into the West Fiji Mission with headquarters remaining at Suva Vou, Viti Levu, and the East Fiji Mission with headquarters located at Buca Bay, Vanua Levu.<sup>48</sup> John B. Keith was appointed the first president of the West Fiji Mission and Walter Ferris the first president of the East Fiji Mission.

In 1958, adjustments were made in the territory of both the East and the West Fiji Missions. Before the adjustment the territory of the East Fiji Mission was "North and South Lau Groups, Lomaviti (excluding Ovalau), Rotuma and Vanua Levu, and adjacent islands."<sup>49</sup> After the adjustment, the territory of the East Fiji Mission was "Vanua Levu and adjacent islands, including Tavenui, Qumea, and Cikobia."<sup>50</sup> The territory of the West Fiji

Mission before the 1958 adjustment was “Kadavu, Ovalau, Viti Levu, and adjacent islands, and Yasawa Islands.”<sup>51</sup> After the adjustment, the territory of the West Fiji Mission was “Kadavu, Lomaiviti, Ovalau, Viti Levu, and adjacent islands, Yasawa Islands, Yasawa Islands, North and South Lau groups, and Rotuma.”<sup>52</sup>

In 1965, the Adventist Church in Fiji was again unified as one local mission designated the Fiji Mission, with headquarters at Suva Vou, Suva, Fiji.<sup>53</sup> It has remained thus without further adjustment until the present time.

## The Mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Fiji

The executive committee of the Fiji Mission has articulated the mission statement for the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Fiji as follows:

“The mission of the Fiji Mission is to provide leadership and support to local Churches within our territory, enabling them to:

Support the church and its members in leading others to accept Jesus as their personal Savior;

Nurture spiritual growth and community;

Develop and enhance corporate unity and purpose;

Enrich individual and congregational worship;

Equip ministers and congregations to reach out and serve their communities in harmony with their spiritual gifts;

Encourage individuals, families and people groups to embrace the Seventh-day Adventist lifestyle, and

Invite every people group and each individual within our region to join this community of believers and prepare for the imminent return of Jesus Christ.”<sup>54</sup>

## Fiji Mission Superintendents<sup>55</sup>

John Tay (August 1891-January 1892); John Cole (1895-1897); John Fulton (1897-1902); Calvin Parker (1903); John Fulton (1904-1905); Calvin Parker (1906); John Fulton (1907); Calvin Parker (1908-1909); Benjamin Cady (1910); Andrew Stewart (1911- 1916); Calvin Parker (1917-1921); Edmund Rudge (1922); Andrew Stewart (1923-1926); Edmund Rudge (1928-1934); Harry Martin (1927); Edmund Rudge (1928-1934); Royce Lane (1935-1937); W. T. Hooper (1938); Leonard Wilkinson (1939); Gordon Branster (1940); Leonard Wilkinson (1941-1945); Cyril Palmer (1946-1947); John Keith (1958-1951)

## West Fiji Mission Superintendents

John Keith (1951-1952); Cyrus Adams (1953-1957); William Coates (1958-1960); Barry Crabtree (1961-1965)

## East Fiji Mission Superintendents

Walter Ferris (1951-1955); Norman Ferris (1956); Barry Crabtree (1957-1960); Rex Cobbin (1962-1963); Mervyn Kennaway (1964-1965)

## Fiji Mission Presidents

Barry Crabtree (1966-1969); Rex Cobbin (1970-1971); Filimone Beranaliva (1972-1983); Aisake Kabu (1984-1988); Samuela Ratulevu (1989-1993); Roger Nixon (1994-1997); Waisea Vuniwa (1998-2001); Tom Osborne (2002-2007); Aseri Sukanabulisau (2008-2014); Luke Narabe (2015 - )

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The primary website of the mission is <https://www.adventist.org.fj/>

2. Other websites are <https://www.facebook.com/fijiadventist/>, an interactive website, and <https://www.hopechannel.fiji.com/> for Hope Channel Fiji operations.

3. "ADM 10.05, Principles of Denominational Organization," in *South Pacific Division Working Policy* (Wahroonga, New South Wales: South Pacific Division, 2018).

4. Ibid.

5. Ibid.

6. *2018 Annual Statistical Report 154th Report of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists for 2016 and 2017*, accessed January 20, 2019,

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18. *Ibid*, 87-93.
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20. *Ibid*.
21. A. Currow, "Council Meeting in Fiji," *Union Conference Record*, May 5, 1904, 2.
22. Eric B. Hare, *Fulton's Footprints in Fiji*, 182.
23. *Ibid*, 179-180.
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25. "The Fijian Council," *Union Conference Record*, August 3, 1908, 2-3.
26. *Ibid*.

27. E. H. Gates, "Report of the Mission Secretary," *Union Conference Record*, September 7, 1908, 4.
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29. "All are glad to greet Brother J. E. Fulton...," *Union Conference Record*, July 17, 1901, 16.
30. E. M. Graham, "The Eastern Polynesian Mission," *Union Conference Record*, September 7, 1908, 7.
31. E. H. Gates, "Eastern Polynesian Mission Conference," *Union Conference Record*, September 1, 1904, 2 – 3.
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35. For example, see "Australasian Union Conference," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1909), 92.
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39. Ibid.
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41. Ibid.
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48. E.g., "East Fiji Mission," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1952), 85; "West Fiji Mission," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1952), 86.
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52. "West Fiji Mission," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1959), 77.
53. E. g., "Fiji Mission," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1967), 90.
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55. 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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