



Samoa Tokelau Mission office in Apia, Samoa.

Photo courtesy of Emmanuel Kalau.

Samoa Tokelau Mission

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 Samoa-Tokelau Mission is a small mission in the territory of the Trans-Pacific Union Mission of the South Pacific Division. Its headquarters are in Apia, Samoa.

The territory of the Samoa-Tokelau Mission is "Samoa and Tokelau." It is a part of and responsible to the Trans Pacific Union Mission, which is based in Tamavua, Suva, Fiji Islands. The Trans Pacific Union comprises 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 administrative office of the Samoa-Tokelau Mission is located at Lalovaea, Apia Samoa. The postal address is PO Box 600, Apia, Samoa.

The mission operates under General Conference and South Pacific Division (SPD) operating policies. Those policies state that the officers of the Samoa-Tokelau Mission are elected by the Trans Pacific Union Mission: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

As of 2018, the Samoa-Tokelau Mission was listed as having thirty-six churches and twenty-six companies. Church membership at the end of 2017 was 7,695. The mission had eighty-five active employees. Its tithe receipts for 2016 totaled US\$699,458. Its tithe and offerings per capita were US\$110.96.⁵

The Schools of the Mission

The Samoa-Tokelau Mission operates three schools.

Samoa Adventist College, located at, Lalovaea, Upolu, had an enrollment at the time of writing of approximately 500 students, in grades one through twelve.⁶

Siufaga Primary School, located on the island of Savaii, had an enrollment at the time of writing of approximately 120 students in grades one through six.⁷

Vailoa Training School, first opened by Harold Larwood in 1916, has had periods of activity and periods of inactivity ever since. Its purpose is to train laypeople in outreach and evangelism.⁸

Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA)

An implementing country office of ADRA International is located at mission headquarters at Lalovaea, Apia. Working closely with ADRA South Pacific, it provides resources for social and community development and responds to natural disasters. For example, in February 2018, ADRA Samoa opened an evacuation center at the Seventh-day Adventist church headquarters in Apia, providing shelter for more than 200 people affected by Cyclone Gita.⁹ The agency also works with other relief organizations, such as the Red Cross, to provide meals and accommodation in times of disaster.¹⁰

The Organizational History of the Mission

Four years after a short visit in May 1891 by the missionary yacht *Pitcairn* while on its first voyage to the Pacific Ocean,¹¹ the first Seventh-day Adventist residents arrived in Samoa in October 1895. Dr. Frederick Braucht and his wife, Mina, together with her father-in-law, Dudley Owen and Pitcairn nurse Emily McCoy, arrived on the fourth voyage of the *Pitcairn* to begin self-supporting medical work.¹²

For the first twelve years, the focus was almost exclusively on the operation of a sanitarium. This changed with the arrival of Joseph and Julia Steed in December 1907.¹³ Soon after arriving, Steed organized the first local church. He reported that there was a church membership of seven, with eleven enrolled as Sabbath School members.¹⁴ There was as yet no formal mission organization. However, the *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* in 1908 listed a "Director and Treasurer" for a "Samoa Mission" for the first time. It was J. E. Steed.¹⁵

Despite the fact that church organization in Samoa at the time was rudimentary to say the least, at the Fijian council in July 1908 a Central Polynesian Mission comprising Samoa, Fiji, and Tonga was formed.¹⁶ Calvin H. Parker was appointed as the chairman, Joseph E. Steed was to care for Samoa, and William W. Palmer for Tonga. Parker also continued as president of the Fiji territory.¹⁷ Action to confirm the organization of the Central Polynesian Mission was taken at the seventh biennial session of the Australian Union Conference held in August 1908.¹⁸

The creation of the Central Polynesian Mission was preceded by the creation of an Eastern Polynesian Mission comprising the Society Islands, with Pitcairn, and the Cook group.¹⁹ 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.²⁰

Each entity within these missions was in its infancy.

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,²¹ Eastern Polynesian District,²² and Eastern Polynesian Mission.²³

Also, there is no listing in the *Seventh-day Adventist 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 Samoa Mission, continued to be listed as a separate entity with no mention of any affiliation to an Eastern Polynesian Mission or Central Polynesian Mission. 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.²⁴

Even though the Church was still in its infancy in the Pacific, 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 1916²⁵ and then discussed and voted at a specially called council at Suvavou, Fiji, commencing on October 5, 1916.²⁶ The office of the conference was located at Suvavou.²⁷ The elected president was Calvin H. Parker, the secretary Joseph E. Steed and the treasurer John E. Nash.²⁸ This was the first time that the organizational designation “conference” was used for Adventist church structures in the Pacific Islands. Samoa was part of that conference.

The Central Polynesian Conference was no longer listed in the *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* by 1922. Rather there was once again a specific listing for a Samoan Mission. A comment under the heading read: “included as part of the Central Polynesian Conference, 1916 to 1921; reorganized 1921.”²⁹ Although listed as a mission, Samoa was still not formally organized as a mission. This was to happen at the Australian Union Conference council held in September 1936. At that time, it was recognized that “the work in Samoa has grown to that place where we believe the interests of the mission can be better served by having the field organised,” and the “the Samoan Islands” were “organised as a mission.”³⁰ At that time, no mention was made of American Samoa or Tokelau. In later editions of the *Yearbook*, reference is made to the church being “established” in American Samoa in 1944.³¹

Until 1949, all of the local conference and mission entities in the Australasian Union Conference, including Samoa, related administratively directly to the Australasian Union itself. But 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 Samoa 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 Samoa 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 administrative 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.

American Samoa and Tokelau were first included as part of the Samoan Mission in the “Samoan Mission” entry in the *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* for 1952.³³ At that time, the mission had only four churches and 393 members.³⁴ In 1954, American Samoa was listed in the *Yearbook* as the “American Samoa Station.”³⁵ This was

changed to the American Samoa District in 1961.³⁶

In 2000, a major reorganization of the unions in the South Pacific Division occurred at the division session.³⁷ The number of unions in the division was reduced from five to four. A union mission, initially designated as the Western Pacific Union Mission but shortly thereafter designated as the Trans Pacific Union Mission, was formed. The former Central Pacific Union was dissolved and the Samoa Mission was now a part of the newly named Trans Pacific Union Mission.³⁸

In 2005, the name of the mission was changed to reflect the territory of the mission. It was designated as the Samoas-Tokelau Mission. It still included American Samoa, Western Samoa and Tokelau.³⁹

In 2016 there was a further significant change. The entry for the Samoa-Tokelau Mission in the *Yearbook* read, "Established 1895; organized 1921; reorganized 2005; reorganized, territory divided, and renamed 2016."⁴⁰ In 2016, American Samoa was detached from the mission and became the American Samoa Attached Region, with headquarters in Pago Pago, American Samoa. Insofar as American Samoa is a separate country from Western Samoa, there had been requests, particularly from church members in American Samoa, that church structure better reflect the political reality. The change was made in 2016 so that American Samoa could administratively relate directly to the Trans-Pacific Union Mission, rather than being tied to a Samoas-Tokelau Mission.⁴¹

After the separation of American Samoa, the name of the Samoas-Tokelau Mission was changed to the Samoa-Tokelau Mission, to reflect the reality that there were no longer two Samoas as part of the territory of the mission: American Samoa and [Western] Samoa. The headquarters of the Samoa-Tokelau Mission continue to be in Apia, Samoa.

Meanwhile, although the small island nation of Tokelau has been named as part of the Samoan Mission since at least 1952, there had been no success in establishing the Adventist Church in that country until a visit was made to Tokelau by the Associate Health Director of the South Pacific Division, Dr. Chester Kuma, in 2011.⁴² Efforts to start a church company are continuing, but as of 2019 there is no formal church structure on Tokelau.⁴³

Samoa Mission Superintendents/Directors⁴⁴

Samoa Mission (1908-1915): J. E. Steed (1908-1909); A. W. White (1910); H. T. Howse (1910-1916).

Central Polynesian Conference (1916-1921): C. H. Parker (1916-1921).

Samoa Mission (1921-2005): H. T. Howse (1921-1925); R. Reye (1926-1928); J. F. Strange (1929-1930); R. Reye (1931-1942); Siaoase Neru (1942); J. Howse (1943-1945); H. B. Christian (1946-1955); I. W. White (1955-1957); D. I. Jenkins (1958-1961); R. W. Taylor (1961-1963); F. W. Pearce (1963-1965); D. E. Hay (1966-1975); Fereti Puni (1976-1977); C. S. Adams (1978-1982); Ripini Rimoni (1983-1985); Alwyn Gersbach (1986-1987); Ripini Rimoni (1988-2000); Samuelu Afamasaga (2000-2005).

Samoa-Tokelau Mission (2005-2016): Uili Solofa (2005-2015); Kenneth Fuliesi (2015-2016).

Samoa-Tokelau Mission (2016-): Kenneth Fuliesi (2016-).

SOURCES

2018 Annual Statistical Report: 154th Report of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists for 2016 and 2017. Silver Spring, MD: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2018. Accessed January 20, 2019.

<http://documents.adventistarchives.org/Statistics/ASR/ASR2018.pdf>

"ADM 10.05, Principles of Denominational Organization." In *South Pacific Division Working Policy*. Wairoa, New South Wales: South Pacific Division, 2018.

"Australasian Union Conference: Advance Moves." *Union Conference Record*," September 7, 1908.

Butler, Matthew and Candice Jaques. "Church to Help Tokelau." *Record*, July 2, 2011.

"Decisions of the Union Conference Council. Held August 29 to September 12, 1916." *Australasian Record*, September 25, 1916.

Gates, E. H. "Report of the Mission Secretary." *Union Conference Record*," September 7, 1908.

Gates, E. H. "Eastern Polynesian Mission Conference." *Union Conference Record*, September 1, 1904.

Hay, David E. *Samoa: 100+ Years*. Hamlyn Terrace, New South Wales: David Hay, 2005.

"Index to this Number." *Union Conference Record*," September 7, 1908.

Manners, Bruce. "Session Votes for Restructure." *Record*, November 25, 2000.

Melmele, Ufulilo. "Walk with Jesus." *Adventist Record*, December 20, 2014.

Piper, H. E. "Special Session, Australasian Union Conference." *Australasian Record*, September 13, 1948.

"Plans and Recommendations." *Australasian Record*, September 28, 1936.

"Samoa Seventh-day Adventist Mission: Education." Accessed January 30, 2019. <https://www.adventist.org.ws/>.

Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook. Various years. <https://www.adventistyearbook.org/>.

"The Fijian Council." *Union Conference Record*, August 3, 1908.

Westerman, W. J. "Organization of Central Polynesian Conference." *Australasian Record*, November 6, 1916.

"Year-end Meetings Go Paperless." *Record*, December 3, 2016.

NOTES

1. *Seventh-day Adventist Online Yearbook*, "Samoa Mission," accessed January 28, 2019, <http://documents.adventistarchives.org/Yearbooks/YB2017.pdf>; The website for the Mission is <http://www.adventist.org.ws/>.
2. "ADM 10.05, Principles of Denominational Organization," in *South Pacific Division Working Policy* (Wahroonga, New South Wales: 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* (Silver Spring, MD: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2018), accessed January 20, 2019, <http://documents.adventistarchives.org/Statistics/ASR/ASR2018.pdf>.
6. "Samoa Seventh-day Adventist Mission: Education," accessed January 30, 2019, <https://www.adventist.org.ws/>.
7. Ibid.
8. Edith B. Howse, "Vailoa Training School, Samoa," *Australasian Record*, June 8, 1936, 2.
9. "Tropical Cyclone Gita Update Report," Samoa Observer, February 14, 2018, accessed April 3, 2020, <https://www.samoaoobserver.ws/category/samoa/4909>.
10. Tracey Bridcutt, "Cyclone Damages Churches, Schools," *Adventist Record*, March 3, 2018, [4].
11. E. H. Gates, "From the 'Pitcairn,'" *ARH*, September 22, 1891, 586.
12. J. E. Graham, "The 'Pitcairn's' Visit to Samoa," *The Bible Echo*, December 16, 1895, 389.
13. C[alvin] H. Parker, "Samoa," *Union Conference Record*, February 17, 1908, 3-4.
14. Joseph E. Steed, "Samoa," *Union Conference Record*, May 18, 1908, 2.
15. *Seventh-day Adventist Online Yearbook*, "Samoan Mission," accessed February 1, 2019, <http://documents.adventistarchives.org/Yearbooks/YB1908.pdf>.
16. "The Fijian Council," *Union Conference Record*, August 3, 1908, 2-3.
17. Ibid.
18. E. H. Gates, "Report of the Mission Secretary," *Union Conference Record*, September 7, 1908, 4.

19. E. M. Graham, "The Eastern Polynesian Mission," *Union Conference Record*, September 7, 1908, 7.
20. E. H. Gates, "Eastern Polynesian Mission Conference," *Union Conference Record*, September 1, 1904, 2-3.
21. "Index to this Number," *Union Conference Record*," September 7, 1908, 44.
22. "Australasian Union Conference: Advance Moves," *Union Conference Record*," September 7, 1908, 3.
23. E. H. Gates, "Report of the Mission Secretary." *Union Conference Record*, September 7, 1908, 5.
24. For example, see *Seventh-day Adventist Online Yearbook*, "Australasian Union Conference," accessed January 27, 2019, <http://documents.adventistarchives.org/Yearbooks/YB1909.pdf>.
25. "Decisions of the Union Conference Council, Held August 29 to September 12, 1916," *Australasian Record*, September 25, 1916, 5.
26. W. J. Westerman, "Organization of Central Polynesian Conference," *Australasian Record*, November 6, 1916, 2.
27. *Seventh-day Adventist Online Yearbook*, "Central Polynesian Conference," accessed January 27, 2019,
28. Ibid.
29. *Seventh-day Adventist Online Yearbook*, "Samoan Mission," accessed January 30, 2019, <http://documents.adventistarchives.org/Yearbooks/YB1922.pdf>.
30. "Plans and Recommendations," *Australasian Record*, September 28, 1936, 7.
31. *Seventh-day Adventist Online Yearbook*, "Samoan Mission: American Samoa Station," accessed February 2, 2019, <http://documents.adventistarchives.org/Yearbooks/YB1954.pdf>. See article American Samoa.
32. H. E. Piper, "Special Session, Australasian Union Conference," *Australasian Record*, September 13, 1948, 2-3.
33. *Seventh-day Adventist Online Yearbook*, "Samoan Mission," accessed February 2, 2019, <http://documents.adventistarchives.org/Yearbooks/YB1952.pdf>.
34. Ibid.
35. *Seventh-day Adventist Online Yearbook*, "Samoan Mission: American Samoa Station," accessed February 2, 2019, <http://documents.adventistarchives.org/Yearbooks/YB1954.pdf>.

36. *Seventh-day Adventist Online Yearbook*, "Samoan Mission: American Samoa District," accessed February 2, 2019, <http://documents.adventistarchives.org/Yearbooks/YB1961.pdf>.
37. Bruce Manners, "Session Votes for Restructure," *Record*, November 25, 2000, 8-9.
38. Ibid; *Seventh-day Adventist Online Yearbook*, "Trans-Pacific Union Mission," accessed January 28, 2019, <http://documents.adventistarchives.org/Yearbooks/YB2002.pdf>.
39. *Seventh-day Adventist Online Yearbook*, "Samoas Tokelau Mission," accessed January 30, 2019, <http://documents.adventistarchives.org/Yearbooks/YB2006.pdf>.
40. *Seventh-day Adventist Online Yearbook*, "Samoa Tokelau Mission," accessed January 30, 2019, <http://documents.adventistarchives.org/Yearbooks/YB2017.pdf>.
41. "Year-end Meetings Go Paperless," *Record*, December 3, 2016, 8.
42. Matthew Butler and Candice Jaques, "Church to Help Tokelau," *Record*, July 2, 2011, 9.
43. Upulilo Melmele, "Walk with Jesus," *Adventist Record*, December 20, 2014, 10.
44. 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.

encyclopedia.adventist.org is an official website of the [Seventh-day Adventist World Church](#)

© 2020 General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists 12501 Old Columbia Pike Silver Spring , MD 20904 USA 301-680-6000